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SERMONS BY THE REV.

JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.

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PRAYER.

WE bless Thee, Thou Father in heaven, for everything that enlarges our life and brightens our outlook and makes us more what Thou didst intend us to be. For worship and song, high thought and deep devotion, we thank Thee as for the ministries that feed and enlarge the soul. We bless Thee for Thy house, for Thy book, for Thy name; Thou hast surrounded us with blessings, Thou hast multiplied Thy lovingkindnesses and Thy tender mercies. We worship Thee, we bow down before Thee, we lovingly and adoringly call upon Thy name. All this we do in the name of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Saviour, our only because our infinite Saviour. It does us good to mention His name; the utterance of it purifies our lips like a warm coal hot from the altar; when we speak of Jesus we become new men, conscious of new creation and of a possible resurrection, and our whole heart is lifted up with gladness when we have mentioned the name of the Saviour. It is the name to sinners dear; it is the name that Thou hast entitled sinners to mention; there is no name given under heaven whereby we can be saved but the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. May we find heart-room in the house of our Father; may we say what is in our heart whilst our Father inclines His ear; may we keep nothing back from the hearing of God. If we dwell upon our sins it is only that we may dwell still longer upon what Jesus Christ did for the sins of the world; night and day would we exclaim, Where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. We live in the "much more" of God's redeeming love. We bless Thee that our eyes have seen and our hands have handled of the Word of life given for the life of the world by the loving heart of God. May we be led further and further into the innermost sanctuary of Thy light and love and grace; may we see more clearly than we have ever seen that God is love. Thou art a God of judgment and of fierce wrath, and the pestilence and the darkness and the arrow that flieth by day and by night are all Thine; yet God is love. Thou didst not mean us to dig graves in the earth, but our sin has dug them; we dig the graves, Thou dost cause the flowers to bloom. God is love; we will say so with all the houses of history,

all the great tabernacles of testimony; with them of old will we unite our voices and say, though mayhap with sobbing hearts, His mercy endureth for ever. Wilt Thou pity Thy poor Church, O Thou who didst redeem her with blood, and crown her with more than fine gold? She is divided and torn, and she belittles herself, and has taken to herself a narrow language and a strange tongue, and has lost the music of her virginity as Thou didst espouse her at the Cross. Lord, pity the poor Church, intoxicated, delirious, proud, vain, foolish with excessive folly; man excommunicating man when man's greatest grace is to hold his tongue. Wilt Thou look upon the earth in its sad condition? Oh the misery! Oh the unspoken grief, the unuttered and inconceivable sorrow! In every house there is a shadow, in every great soul there is a lament which dare not utter itself in words In every cradle there is a hope, a promise, the beginning of a song; and yet the cradle but rocks itself into the tomb. Oh the pain, the misery, the wild dolorous sense of loneliness and desolation! Wilt Thou hear Thy people when they say, Thy kingdom come? Thou art preparing for the coming of Thy kingdom, now by peace, now by war, now by great loss of blood, and now by shattered ambitions, and now by gentle breathings of human love. Thy kingdom is coming. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Amen.

LXI.

CHRIST'S LEGACIES.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JANUARY 21ST, 1900.

"*I give*——"—JOHN xiv. 27.

WE are in spirit gathered around the Son of Man almost at the very moment of His exit from this scene of earth and time. He is, so to say, making His will; in modern phrase, He is disposing of His possessions, He is devising and bequeathing legacies. We may easily and happily imagine ourselves to be present at the distribution of His property. In a sense we can readily under-

stand the Saviour is His own executor; again and again He says, "I give." We want to know what it is that He gives, and to whom He gives it, and for what purpose He bequeaths it. Surely this is an interesting spectacle and a thrilling engagement. The Son of God is just about to leave the earth, and He calls His friends together, and through them He calls the Church of all coming ages, and He devises and bequeaths and endows and enriches with both hands and with His whole heart. We should delight to be present when such a testator devises His property.

The words now quoted from the Gospel of John may be regarded as a motto rather than a text. It is a motto pointing towards detailed statements; the particulars of the devising in which Jesus Christ is now at this historical moment engaged. Every word of His was always more precious than jewels; if possible the closing words are more precious than any that went before them. There is a softness, a light, a starry gleam about them which almost compels us to mix our metaphors and devise new ones, that we may represent the feebleness of our impoverished expression. Let us be as near Him as we can that we may hear the will. It is not the will of some dying plutocrat or pauper. It has nothing to do with gold and silver and houses; it has to do with blessings, comforts, inspirations, and assurances that exhaust all language and turn the soul into one fervent dream and brilliant but speechless imagination. His voice will be low and tender, but well heard if well listened to. We could hear much if we listened much.

Hear these beautiful words spoken by the Son of Man: "I have given you an example." He took a towel and girt Himself, and took a basin filled with water, and He began to wash the feet of the disciples, and He wiped them with the towel with which He was girt, and then He said, "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example." We have nothing to do with the literal illustration. We deprive

ourselves of the greatest spiritual blessings by insisting upon the literal word and the literal instance. The example was not one of feet-washing, it was one of humility, condescension, brotherly service, willingness to help, accounting everything dignified and beautiful that was inspired and illustrated by the Lord. The poor are always with us, and we can joyously endure their presence and can even cultivate their companionship; but the literalists are always with us, and they spoil the prayer, and tear the music out of the holy psalm, and turn the heavens and the earth into one grim cloud of praise. What we have to learn is the inner lesson, the everlasting truth, the spiritual purpose of the living God. In this instance Jesus Christ did not institute a sacrament, He cultivated a spirit, a temper of the heart, a disposition of the soul; and we wash one another's feet when we are willing in Christ's name and for Christ's sake to do everything in our power to help those who are round about us. "I have given you an example": a million golden pounds would poorly express that gift and bequest. It is in our power to bequeath an example of purity, tenderness, sympathy, condescension. He dies rich who can leave to his children and to his neighbours an honourable, beautiful example.

That is one clause of the will which we are now reading.

Another clause reads thus: "My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you; peace, My peace, divine peace, I leave with you." He does not distribute His clothes, He distributes His soul. That is the will! Blessed are they who are included in this devising and bequeathing. I know of no man who is excluded from this will, if he be of a broken heart and a penitent spirit. Peace knows nothing of panic. The whole world is nearly every morning thrown into panic by bubbles that are wafted over by the wind from far-away countries or countries near at hand. It seems to be a patriotic intelligence that frets itself to death about what it has nothing to do with. Does it not seem patriotic to fall into hysterics and shout incoherently about things that are not half

understood and in which there is oftentimes nothing to be understood? The soul that lives in God knows nothing of panic; the soul that tabernacles with the Most High is not at the mercy of a newsboy; the soul that lives with God in Christ says, The Lord reigneth; He has a great purpose and design which He will work out and none can hinder; the proud shall stoop under His rod, ambition shall be disappointed, and self-idolatry shall be crushed, and the kingdom of God figured by that blue summer sky shall come more and more, until there be no room for darkness, and until the habitations of cruelty are torn down and scattered to the wind. "How is it that ye have no faith?" That is the wonder of the soul of Christ. We can imagine in what tone of voice He uttered the inquiry; He was perplexed and disappointed, He was sore wounded in the heart, He said again and again, "How is it that you have no faith?" Where the peace of God is there is no fear, there is no night, there is no more sea, there is no more death. We may have to wait, but the peace of God gives us the power to wait. Waiting is not a grace, it is a virtue; it is stronger than a grace, and then it grows up from being a virtue to becoming a grace in the divinest and most supernatural sense. So that effort becomes easy, labour rest. This is a great miracle, to be interpreted and enjoyed only by experience. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for thou shalt yet praise Him who is the health of thy countenance and thy God. The Bible has been pleading with us for many a day to sit down.

The third clause of the will is a very tender one:—"I will not leave you comfortless; I will send you another Paraclete, Advocate, or Comforter: if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I go away I will send Him unto you; He shall not speak of Himself, He shall take of the things that are Mine and show them unto you, and He will lead you into all truth; He will show you things that are coming, He will bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever that I have said unto you." These will be the festive times, the consciously realised Holy Spirit. I

will not leave you orphans; I go away that I may be nearer to you; I come down upon you through a wider gyration and sweep of energy and influence; you cannot understand this; I am patient with you, saith Christ; I know your infirmity, I know you are still in the flesh, I know you are guided by your few poor senses that were only meant from the very first to be elementary and initial; I understand your whole case; by-and-bye you will understand what it is to be nearer when you are further. This is not a question of physical measurement; you will understand in due time if you be patient, if you pass through the costly school of experience, what it is to have more by having less, and to win the life by losing it. I know, continues Christ, that all these are contradictions to you now; you cannot bear all I have to say to you in your present degree and state of education; by-and-bye you will begin to see what I mean when I tell you that I go away that I may help you. All this is dead against our rules of language and our poor little mud-grammar house; that miserable building wholly of our own doing cannot hold the sun; we mistake the ceiling for the sky, and we think the window is the horizon. Nothing can get us out of these fallacies but prolonged, bitter, diversified experience; nay, nothing can deliver us from these terrible imprisonments but the Cross. When we are crucified with Christ, we shall rise with Christ, and our words are sown in corruption, but are raised in incorruption. The resurrection penetrates all things and gives all things true and beautiful their divine embodiment and expressiveness. We are in the age of the Spirit; we are now realising this special covenant in the will of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Still there seems to be something more in the will if the reader would but continue his recitation of its terms. There is another clause: is it not the sweetest clause of all? "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself." The will would now seem to be complete. We can live upon a promise spoken by such lips; but we shall have to live a long time before we can understand these little words, "I will come again." You think you understand them because their meaning is on their face. It is not. The mean-

ing of God is never on the face of things. A lily requires an interpreter; a blade of grass requires an angel to unfold its meaning to the observing eye. "I will come again"—in a thousand ways, in My own way; not at all of necessity in your way, or through the channel of your imagination; I will come in My own way and be there if you will look for Me. I am always there; My coming is from the beginning and is eternal; it is in your consciousness that the miracle must take place. If it were possible for us to open the eyes of the blind man he would not create the sun, he would behold it; the sun has been there through all the centuries, but the sight to see it has not been there. To the man whose eyesight has been recovered it will seem as if the sun had been just made, but a moment ago rounded and hurled into its place by the infinite energy of God. The recovered blind man would be at perfect liberty to say this, for it is in this way that the matter represents itself to his newly awakened consciousness, and indeed to his newly completed personality. If he started the matter—call the matter an argument—from the standpoint of his own consciousness and experience, who would blame him? Your room at darkest midnight has all the furniture in it and all the pictures, but you cannot see one of them; would you therefore say that furniture and pictures are not there? To that depth of folly you would never descend; you want the light, you may have the eyes, but the eyes without the light are helpless. Now the light does not create the pictures, it simply enables you to see them. The light has never left us—"Lo, I am with you alway unto the end of the age"; He is a God nigh at hand, and not afar off. He is accessible and approachable every moment of the day, but we are not always equally sensitive to His presence. What we therefore have to pray for is that we may be made sensitive so that we may feel the air, and feel the air within the air, and learn little by little this great word, "God is a Spirit."

The Lord Jesus said very nearly at the point of His leaving, handing them a morsel of the supper bread and a drop of the wine which they had been drinking at the supper, "Do this in remembrance of Me." And

what a mystery we have made of it! And what a complication! what a battlefield! and what noisome controversy has arisen from this simple exhortation! It does not read to me like a command; I hear the sound of entreaty in the expression, "Do this in remembrance of Me." It was not a sacrament, it was not an ecclesiastical or official feast; we have degraded the simplicity of that action; and we have degraded everything we have touched; the moment we pluck a flower we kill it. The Lord and the disciples were at the common feast, the love-feast, and in a moment as it were Jesus signalised that feast by asking His disciples to sanctify all bread and all wine, all eating and drinking; every meal we take should be the Lord's supper in its highest significance. It was so understood in the Church; for seven hundred years there was nothing like what we call the Lord's supper; for seven hundred years the Church did without it. It is only true in the sense in which it is an act of the heart; love awakening its own memory, gratitude stirring up its own consciousness, and going back to the old, old time while the Roman gallows were standing to receive the body of the Son of God. Let all eating and drinking be sacramental; let every time man and wife clasp each other's hands be the wedding day, the new wedding with the old blessing; let every ring that is on the finger be a wedding ring; let every mouthful of bread we take be the Lord's body, taken by faith; thus let us live in Him and on Him and through Him, and thus let Him come again and receive us unto Himself. Poor Church! By poor Church I mean all the Christian communions with their divers denominations and badges and banners and rag flags; I do not refer to any one single communion, but all these communions have gone a-whoring from their sweet Lord, and have made themselves gods of their own invention in the form of ceremonies and statutes and divers observances; all of which the apostle seems to throw away with almost avenging hands as though they concealed and degraded the simplicity of the Lord.

The Lord who made the will designs us all to partake of it. Not one soul is left out of Christ's testament. There is something for everyone. The more faith, the more blessing; the more trustfulness in the

Spirit and in the love of God, the greater the religious enjoyment. In this way nothing is to come between us and the Lord Himself. I am not to be introduced to my Lord, except by my sin; I do not want a man's letter, my own leprosy is enough; and if I may but touch the hem of His garment I shall be made whole. And we shall thus grow towards simplicity, all ecclesiastical manufactures will be taken away, and God and man shall stand as it were face to face—the face of Sin looking on the face of Love, and the finger of Mercy pointing to the Cross. How simple, yet how profound! This is what we need; this is the vital matter. If all people would believe this there would be new heavens and a new earth, and every day would be midsummer day.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, our hearts go out to those who are on the field of battle on both sides, and we pray that reason and righteousness and humanity may triumph. We are all in Thine image, men; may we see the image of God in one another, and may the time come when men shall put up their sword into its sheath, for they that use the sword shall perish by the sword. Pity us, Lord, in this time of darkness and grief, and sore loss. God save the Queen! And look upon our opponents in the field of battle, many of them wise men and strong, with an honourable family record. The Lord send us relief in some way on both sides, so that without loss of national honour on the one side or the other, we may see our way to peace, to the best patriotism, to a divine philanthropy. We ask it in the name of Christ, and especially when we ask Thee to pity those who to-day are widows and orphans through no fault of their own. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Heavenly Father, and the fellowship and comfort of the Holy Ghost abide with us through the night till the shadows flee away! Amen.

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

A pastor's life should be vocal; sermons must be practised as well as preached. Though Noah's workmen built the ark, yet themselves were drowned. God will not accept the tongue where the devil has the soul. Jesus did "do and teach." If a man teach uprightly and walk crookedly, more will fall down in the night of his life than he built in the day of his doctrine.—*Owen*, 1616-1683.

The faithful minister is strict in ordering his conversation. As for those who cleanse blurs with blotted fingers, they make it the worse. It was said of one who preached very well, and lived very ill, "that when he was out of the pulpit, it was a pity he should ever go into it; and when he was in the puplit, it was a pity he should ever come out of it." But our minister *lives* sermons. And yet I deny not, but dissolute men, like unskilful horsemen, who open a gate on the wrong side, may, by the virtue of their office, open heaven for others, and shut themselves out.—*Fuller*, 1608-1661.

The preacher stands up before his audience to proclaim salvation and offer pardon to the guilty—to the guiltiest, by the blood of Jesus. By all that is sacred and holy, by all that is tender and terrible, by love to God and regard to themselves, he urges on them its cordial and immediate acceptance. Yet how often do the vacant eyes, and unmoved demeanour of hearers—so unlike persons under sentence of death getting tidings of a pardon—remind him of the question, Shall horses run upon the rock, shall a man plough there with oxen? A very profitless field! Time, besides shedding snows on our head, draws furrows on our brow; but it is not over bald mountain brows that the husbandman guides his plough. Cultivating the soil of the valley, he leaves the rocky summits to the eagle, to mists and clouds and roaring tempests. Bolder than he, the preacher of the gospel casts the seed of the word on stony hearts. Why not? Has not God encouraged him, saying, Is not my word a fire, and hammer to break the stone in pieces? Yet, alas! how often does the result of his most solemn, most startling, most searching appeals but shew that he has run his horses on a rock, and ploughed there with oxen!—the only feeling elicited, temporary—like the spark which the horse's hoof strikes from the rock; dying the instant of its birth.—*Guthrie.*

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou hast set us amid wondrous surroundings, now summer, now winter, now the cold blossoms of snow, and now the warm blossoms of June. We hear music without words, and words without music, and there is a sound in the air as of strife and wrath and hell moved to its depths. Now there come to us angel voices, as if babes were singing and bringing gladness into our hearts in wondrous ways. Such is Thy providence,—a daily parable, a daily pain, a daily resurrection with its accompanying song. May we be of steadfast mind, that we may note these things, and read the unwritten word, and deeply consider when our hearts are in sore trouble or in a very tempest of gladness. The Lord is round about us, and within us, and Thou dost set us behind and before and lay Thine hand upon us; Thou dost consider man as if he were a subject worthy of Thy thought. What is man? Sometimes so little, oftentimes so possibly great. We have come to thank Thee for all Thy wondrous kindness, so great that we have called it lovingkindness, as if it were kindness upon kindness, like summer swiftly following summer without any winter between We have come to sing of household mercies and of household judgments; for Thou hast made the desolate alive with joy, and Thou hast turned the song of those that were of proud and ungrateful heart into a great silence. This is Thy way, Thy wondrous untold way. We have lived long enough to believe this, we have studied Jesus Christ long enough to know that all things are working out to the eternal summer. Thou hast made some sad halting-places by the way; Thou hast done some things we could not have done even to dogs. We know not the meaning of anything just now, but Thou hast hidden a promise in our heart, and our hearts already see the dawn beyond the darkness, and we see the darkness fleeing away as with the speed of shame. Thou art teaching us these things outside Thy Book; then when we come to read Thy Book we find them all confirmed by the holy Word, yea, and all predicted and sealed with the sovereign seals of Thy court, and made sure to us for ever in Christ Jesus. All that we know of Thy government we know through our Lord and Saviour, in whose name we approach Thee. He spake familiarly of Thyself, called Thee Father; He

spake about the bosom of God and the Son that lay therein in eternal peace and safety; He promised us great things in His name, and in Thine; yea, He pledged the Deity to resurrection and immortality and heaven and service unspeakable. All these years we have been trusting to such promises; they have yielded us great fruit, they have stirred us as with heavenly inspiration, they have enabled us to defy the enemy, and to ask Death for his sting and the Grave for his poor victory. Thou hast done great things for us in Jesus Christ our Lord: He is the Amen of God, He is the Amen of our hearts, He writes and reads and interprets and applies the covenant. We stand in Christ Jesus; in Him we cannot fail. How many are our complaints and are our murmurings, our sore griefs and tender sensitive misery! Behold, we represent them all: the child is in great pain or in great danger; the old man is laying aside his staff and his sandals; the busy man has just heard that a brother man in merchandise has been struck dead as by an invisible axe. In the midst of life we are in death; we have great fears about one another which we may not speak; we tell lies to one another by speaking words of cheerfulness which our hearts refuse to believe. Thou knowest the mystery of pity, Thou art the author of that great riddle, and Thou wilt not condemn us with all the austerity of Thy righteousness. The prodigal is far away, further away to-day than ever before, quite beyond the reach of our hesitating prayer, but not beyond the reach of the mercy which endureth for ever. If any man's way is hard and on the sunless side of the road, or up a steep hill where everything is against him, Thou canst bring to bear upon him influences which will throw down all difficulties and lift up hopes downtrodden. If any man is beset as with seven devils, so that he cannot wholly utter the prayer that he would utter if he could, the Lord be merciful to him lest at last the devil should be successful. We gather all our sick folks together, them that are faint and weary and in a hopeless condition, paralytic, apoplectic, and those who have divers diseases, and we lay them all at Thy feet, Thou Healer of the world. The Lord comfort those who are in special sadness because of the torment of fear, because of great weakness and sinking of heart; the Lord lay His hand on the dumb and those who are too sorely driven to be able to complain of their misery. It is a sad world; Thou didst make it, and Thou didst not make it sad; Thou hast brought into it redemption and deliverance, new mornings and new summertimes. The Lord hear us and pity us even in our best estate. Amen.

LXII.

THINGS NO MAN COULD SAY.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JANUARY 28TH, 1900.

"*I say unto you.*"—MATT. v. 20.

THINGS which no man would say or would be allowed to say and retain any reputation for sanity or truthfulness. There are things which we cannot say, as certainly as there are things which we ought not to say. There is a language of profanity or obscenity; we do not allow ourselves to speak it; just as certainly as that, there is another language religious, pious, which we cannot use, which we would not use, which no apology, how full soever, could excuse us in using or for having used. Observe that there is an environment or liberty of language. The agricultural labourer uses only three hundred words. He is not forbidden to use four hundred or a thousand, but the agricultural labourer is limited, perhaps he has had no opportunity of acquiring other words; we therefore do not blame the agricultural labourer because he is shut up within such narrow verbal confines. Then there are other words we dare not use, because of their moral rottenness. Were a man to use such words in society, society would either expel him or abandon him. How so? Are they not all words? Yes, they are words, but words not to be used by self-respecting or reverential men. There are those who have broken limits and freely intersperse their common conversation with vulgarisms and profanities; such people have no standing; society is revolted. Society may not condescend to show at the moment its true estimate of such unholy customs, but society will take care to abstain from the company and fellowship of persons who have so stigmatised themselves as unworthy of notice or confidence or respect. So we come into the very highest class of language, and there we find ourselves either shut up or severely limited; we have to explain ourselves when we use certain most religious words; we say, "If we may be permitted to say so,"

or we parenthetically observe, "If we may borrow so great an expression." We feel that we are in an Eden of language of which we may taste of only one tree. In the first instance we might partake of all the trees but one, but we are now in a paradise of which we may not partake of one tree without express permission or special explanation and apology.

Yet we are now face to face with a Man who used all the vocabulary of God, a Man who never hesitated to use the language which God alone, according to our interpretation, has permitted Himself to use. It is not poet's licence; no poet is licensed to be blasphemous; the court of heaven issues no licences to blasphemers. Jesus Christ set aside all the great teachers of history; He said, "It hath been said to you by them of old time . . . but I say unto you." No man is at liberty to set aside the great teachers and founts of historic wisdom, knowledge, and experience, unless he can produce a special authority for such supersession. There are some things which cannot be done; no man, let us repeat, can stand up and say, I sweep away all the founts of morality, all the springs of ethical teaching, all the intellectual philosophies of the ages, I simply sweep them away. No man is permitted to do that. Here is a Man who in effect said, You must take the law from My lips. We want to know how He establishes His authority, so to say; there must be an authority that we can investigate. All the sources of His authority are open to us, and it can be proved within a very limited compass that this Man had a right to use the words, and it is the business of this discourse to prove unmistakably, emphatically, without the possibility of doubt, that He had a right to use the words which set Him at the head of all history and set Him forth in heaven and earth as the Maker of all things new.

Begin where you like, the evidence is forthcoming and is unique. Let us hear Him in one of His simplest speeches; simplest, that is, when looked upon superficially: "I am meek and lowly in heart." No man has a right to say that; to say "I am meek" is to prove that the speaker is not meek; to claim lowliness may be to abandon it. Never forget the

ironies of history. You should study the great figure of speech called irony and its special uses throughout the whole Biblical record, in which things are said by way of mockery, in which things are said to prove that they ought evidently not to be said. Consider what it is for a man to stand up in any company of his fellows and to say, "I am meek and lowly in heart"! Not a soul would believe him; there is a human instinct, an unwritten transcendental human intuition that says to a speaker, No, for if you were so you would not speak thus; you would leave us to discover your meekness and your lowliness of heart.

Take another instance, running on the same line: "I will give you rest." This is a word that no sane man can utter if he be only a man. If we could really get at his roots and beginnings, if we could dig into the very bed of his genesis and get down to the very protoplasm of his social beginnings, we should be able to bring evidence to bear upon the presumptuousness of any such offer. Who knows the meaning of rest as Jesus Christ used that pregnant word? No man can give another man rest; he can lull him, soothe him, administer opiates to him, and bring to bear upon him the influence of chemical anodynes; he cannot give peace, rest, fulness of peace. Jesus Christ said that He would give the world rest; He challenged all the weary and heavy laden to come to Him and take away rest, leaving behind them only their burdens. If He said so, we must challenge Him for His proofs. He will supply them this morning, here, now, and undeniably. Let us wait.

No man is at liberty to say, "I and my Father are one," no matter in what sense he uses the terms. We will not endeavour to take away their natural and proper meaning; we will not suggest parentheses or mental reservation; we insist upon the words being accepted precisely as they were uttered; and no man is able to say with truthfulness, "I and my Father are one." How does he know that? If he can speak familiarly of the Father he must be the Father. If he is speaking with limitations he is speaking unfairly, because he has not hinted at any limita-

tion in the great deliverance which he has just made. He cannot come in an hour hence and say, I meant in my degree. You did not say that, you misled us, you lied; therefore you have taken away your own right to come back with amendments and explanations; you must not assail the very foundations of human reason and human consciousness, human aspiration and instinct, and then come back in a month to explain that you did not mean it just in that sense. But you said it just so, and we risked our souls upon it. No man has a right to trifle with the common language. If He had said this only once some crafty mind might have endeavoured to explain that the words are perhaps the interpolation of a careless scribe. But Jesus Christ said nothing only once. Hear the statement, and I will refer you to the proofs. There is not a word, so far as I have been able to search the record, which Jesus Christ ever uttered that He did not always utter; not necessarily in the same form of words, but as to the same substance and emphasis and responsibility of meaning.

Take this instance: "I and my Father are one." If that occurs only once perhaps it was introduced surreptitiously, but it does not occur only once; for the same lips said: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." No man in this congregation would be allowed to say that. In saying it he would instantly destroy his own reputation; what this congregation signifies includes the whole world and all the ages. Fix your mind upon the picture. A man arises anywhere, under any sky, and in any language, and says, He that hath seen me hath seen God—hath seen the Father—hath seen the One Father. A man may have said that, but he called down upon himself the ridicule of all who heard it; he did not seek the faith of the world, he tempted its distrust and its derision.

Hear Him once again, as we might hear Him in every day of His life: "I will raise him up at the last day." A man cannot say that, and be only a man; he is a lunatic, he is the devil, or he is God. You cannot make a commonplace of him; you find no place in history that he can occupy. "I will," there is

personal, definite, sovereign decree, purpose, or resolution; "raise him up," perform the crowning miracle, make him again with ennobled powers; "I will raise him up"—that young man, comparative boy, youth, some thirty years of age, without social credentials, without any appearance that would favour his empty declaration. The Jews were perfectly right in taking up stones to stone him; it was the only right and proper thing to be done if he were what they supposed him to be; stone is the natural reply to such insanity. "At the last day," meaning, I will be there; whenever the last day may come, centuries or millenniums hence, I will be there, and I will undertake the responsibility of re-establishing this man in conscious life and in individual and social responsibility. If any man were to arise in this audience and say, "I will raise him up at the last day," he would be taken out—the modern and natural form of stoning. No man has a right to blaspheme, nor has any man a right to make promises which he cannot fulfil. We condemn this policy in commerce: if a man's note is returned, that man is degraded, distrusted, marked, proclaimed a commercial leper. We cannot allow, therefore, any man in history to stand up and say, "I will raise this or that man up at the last day"; he must not avail himself of the condition or concealment of countless centuries; we must not allow the centuries to create a glamour around this man's name; we ought to be just to the centuries; we ought indeed to be present in mind, in judgment, and in conscience at the very moment the speech was made, if it were made five thousand years ago. We have no right to interpret such a text at the end of fifty centuries, covering the text itself with the aureole of superstition, with the haze and the glamour of something that cannot be proved. The historian, to be just to the occasion, must live himself backwards all the fifty centuries, and get beside the man really to interpret him. Can any man in the world stand this test? Not one. If any man has uttered these words he was less than a man or more than a man; and you cannot find a middle place for him.

These are some of the passages. Now these passages put Christ in this position; they utterly dis-

credit Him; He is the victim of His own pretensions; He has discrowned Himself in the presence of sober-minded, honourable criticism. If He had claimed less He might have received more. He would sit down nowhere but on the throne. A man may easily cut up his own claims and pretensions, and may be burned by lighting his own certificates and credentials, and go up with them in their own smoky evaporation. But if the words are true they make Jesus Christ more than a man and better than a man; and you cannot remove those words from the record without removing Christ with them. Let us clearly understand that; you cannot take out all these self-assertions and self-revelations, and still leave the Christ on the record. Jesus Christ was made by these very claims, or He has no standing in history; it is when He separates Himself from other men that He becomes in very deed the Christ of God, the Darling of the Father. Do not suppose that you can retain all these and idealise them. Who is this marvellous little man who has taken out a licence to idealise things?—a man who dresses himself well, and feeds himself well, and keeps up a large estate, and does divers things which attract the attention of the world for a moment or two, and who says that all these things must be taken of course in an ideal or transcendental way. We say, My little sir, who are you? where did you come from? and whither are you going? Nay, stop, that would be to make too big a figure of him—go on, and never let us see you again.

Now these things cannot be the utterances of an insane man, because of the discipline which follows them. The longer I live the more I see the argumentativeness of discipline. I find that discipline is the seal and corroboration of all merely intellectual reasoning. Others I can read because they do not ask me to do anything. When I was comparatively young I bought the last and largest work of the last and greatest English philosopher, and I said, Now I will find all these things out. I read his first chapter, some eight-and-forty crowded octavo pages, and I could have read them every day in the week, and have done nothing. I could have written marginal

notes upon those pages, and never lost a night's sleep for any poor dying little child; I could have read all the words, and looked up every one of them in the dictionary—for the very last and greatest of the dictionaries would be required for the purpose of elucidating these wonderful polysyllables—I could have done all that, and stopped the pension which I was paying to poverty. I cannot read the Sermon on the Mount and be the same man after it I was before reading it; I am better or I am worse. This Man of Nazareth calls upon me to do, to go, to heal, to teach, to preach, to forgive, and to be known by the stigma, the brand of the Cross, or the burden thereof. The one thing that Jesus Christ will not allow me to do with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the fourfold record of His life, is to read them, and praise them, and say what wonderfully limpid minds they had, and how very deeply they were fascinated by this marvellous Carpenter. Jesus Christ will not allow such reading or such annotation; His word is, Crucify, cut off, pluck out, forgive. Oh the last, the climacteric word! He who does not forgive can never enter heaven. I could read, either originally or by translation, all the ancient philosophers, and spend my night in the bed of lust, or spend my night with Bacchus, the drinking god; but I cannot read a chapter of my Lord's speech without feeling that I must be holy if I would be acceptable by God, and that I can only be made holy in one way. Sanctification does not come by divers and by contradictory processes. I feel that to be a just criticism upon the New Testament, and especially upon the Gospels. Is there no argument in this? Christ could not have been lunatic, because He was beneficent; Christ must have been divine, because He was a disciplinarian of a kind the world has never provided before. That is the argument. I could idealise, but I have to give my loaf to the hungry. Is that idealism? I could say that of course He was really a very beautiful character, quite a jewel creature, quite a beautiful flower in the garden of history. But He says, "Forgive." That kills my little theory! I say He was a delightful man to listen to, because never man spake like this man in the mere manner of His utterance, so sweet, so tender, so gracious. But

said He, "Love your enemies." Ay! no lunatic ever talked like that. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him." That is a strange lunacy, if lunacy at all. He says, "Follow Me." I say, Lord, this I will gladly do; I shall be pleased to do it; I love Thee, I love Thy young-heartedness, I am charmed by something that I see in Thee that I see in nobody else; I will follow Thee with pleasure. "Take up your cross before you come." That alters the case! He might have had me as a follower, but He demanded that I should bring a cross with me; so I consulted with the flesh, the world, and the devil, and the indifferent Christian—which is the worst species of opponent the Lord ever had—and we agreed that if we could follow Him without a cross we should be glad, but He said, "Except a man take up his cross, he cannot be My disciple." This was no mere man. Call Him incarnate Satan, and you may have some kind of defence; call Him God manifest in the flesh, and you have a grand support in the book of God; but never attempt to make a mere man of Him, for then you insult God and misunderstand His Son.

I know the difficulties of this position from a social and ecclesiastical point of view. It would be comfortable and socially easy to sit down beside a man who denied the Lord's deity, and say we are practically one. We are not; we are separated by infinity. The man who says Jesus Christ was only a man may be right; the man who says Jesus Christ was Emanuel, God with us, in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead, bodily, may be right; but they cannot both be right. And I ask you to form your own judgment, to read the Book, to study deeply and lovingly the mind and heart of Christ. It would be socially reputable to forget the difference between the one conception of Christ and the other, and might bring with it a little popularity for the moment; but there are times when we must be faithful to our convictions even at the risk of being called narrow and prejudiced. Such little crosses I could carry as a handful of chips, they are no crosses. But when it comes to saying to Christ, "My Lord and my God!" I accept the responsibility of that faith. I want in that faith to die.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou hast called us in Christ Jesus to a great fight. Fight the good fight of faith, is Thy word from heaven, and when Thou speakest such a word Thou dost mean to supply the necessary grace. Thou dost not command without at the same time finding the strength; Thou dost not vex and mock Thy creatures; Thou speakest great words and givest them great commands in order that they may test the fulness and sufficiency of the eternal grace. May we put that grace to the test, may we lean upon it the whole weight of our souls, not attempting to protect ourselves at any single point, but trusting the whole necessity to the unfailing, condescending grace of God. Thou hast called every soul to battle, Thou hast not exempted one of Thy people from the great strife, but Thou art able to do exceeding abundantly above all that they ask or think; it is when they are sorely put to it that Thou showest the wealth of Thine own resources. We are all tried, tested, some are sorely torn, and others are deeply wounded; they have got past the period of tears and are now in the agony of silent grief. Thou hast a message for each, Thou hast a cordial for every soul; no man need leave Thy throne unblessed, Thou living, loving, all-saving One. We have been taught to say this because we have companied with Jesus, we have caught His breath upon our cheeks as we have lingered near Him, and the very music of His soul has passed into our hearts as we have tarried at His feet. We ask everything in His name and for His sake, without whom there is no Christian prayer, but by whose blood we enter into the holiest and bring out with us into the common air and the common light some great support and some healing grace. If Thou hast been hard in Thy providence upon some men, it is that Thou mayest show them exceeding great and tender love. They have wondered about the harshness of God; their song has been of judgment; they have not yet been able to sing of mercy, but one day Thou wilt enable them to sing of Thy mercy also, and they will say in their new song, He hath done all things well. Prepare us for the great fight, for the daily struggle, for the nightly wrestling, for the hand-to-hand work that comes in this great battlefield of life. Amen.

LXIII.

THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD.

EPHESIANS vi. 13-18.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 1ST, 1900.

NO man could have invented this expression. It brings with it some sign and token of its divine origin. The most of things that are in the Scriptures are things that never would have occurred to the mind of man. Hence I stand by the old argument that the Bible is a book which no man could have written if he would, or would have written if he could. The uniqueness is part of the argument. "The whole armour of God." Is there any mere poetry in the word whole? Is it employed or introduced in order to perfect a rhetorical climax? or is there great weight of meaning in the word whole? Is it the emphatic word in the exhortation? or are all the words on one high level?—the monotony not of weakness or weariness, but of completeness. We must revert to our own spiritual experience if we would receive a sufficing answer to these inquiries. Could we do without the word whole? What does the word whole stand for in this connection? It stands for completeness; there must not be one piece of the panoply overlooked, nor must the places and arrangements of the armour be for a moment changed or otherwise related. The provision of the divine grace is complete; we are armed from the head to the foot, there is no unprovided place or spot in all this divine clothing with spiritual steel. But is there any meaning in the word whole? Yes, there is great meaning in that word. Consider what the exhortation would be without the word whole, complete, entire; it would be a different command or exhortation; the

military tone would be taken out of it. It would sink into a very poor admonition. There is a kind of gentle severity in the very language, and specially in that one word "whole armour." Consider what it would be if we missed any one of the pieces. A man is panoplied all over except the helmet. Then he is doomed, no matter how muscular he may be, how alert, how determined. Suppose a man is panoplied all over except the shield. He is lost, no matter what his sword may be or his helmet of brass; if he has no shield his heart is exposed. Suppose a man is armed all over except the sword; the foe mocks him, asks him to produce his sword of straw, laughs at him. Does the foe deride him simply because he is wanting in one solitary piece of armour? That is precisely what the foe does. The armour is not to be looked upon as consisting of pieces; although it is given in detail, it is only given in detail in order to mark the solidity of the unity of the panoply. The armour is only enumerated that it may be totalled, brought to one grand fitness.

Many persons are armed in places. If nine points out of ten are attended to, these people suppose that they are very well provided for, but they are not. You have shut up all your castle, every window, every door, except the postern gate, the little gate behind, the small door that a small burglar may pass through. All that is wanted is not an army of burglars, but one little child-burglar that can creep through an unguarded pane of glass. Enough! the castle is in the hands of the thief. How noticeable it is that people are very fond of pet graces and favourite virtues, and how they dangle these before the eyes of these poor creatures who are not similarly created or provided for at those special points. It is heart-sickening, it must hurt the Saviour! How the mean creature who does not thirst for strong drink mocks the poor creature who, under the pressure of three generations, burns to drink the fire-fluid! The Pharisee holds himself erect and says in the audience of the people, I do not need stimulants, I have no craving for strong drink! other people can surely do as well as I can. Hold thy tongue, thou servant of the pit! thine own brother mayhap may have an

unquenchable fire in his throat, for which he is not so broadly responsible as may be supposed at first sight. The generations come up again; we reap old harvests; our forefathers are living in us; they heat the blood; they should be twice damned. "The evil that men do lives after them." So it is through the whole gamut of human experience and spiritual utterance; we are apt to be proud of the particular part of armour which we have, and to torment other people because they are not equally strong at the same points, though they may be stronger at other points in the clothing of the divine panoply. Let us be merciful, let us be tenderly gracious; the people who are more easily tempted than we are know it, mourn it, cry over it in unknown places and in darkened hours; too well they know their weakness and their shame. Do not let us who are not tempted in such directions hold ourselves up as stupendous models of behaviour in some other direction. A man may not be drunk, but his soul may be steeped in covetousness, which is worse than drunkenness. A man may not be led away by his passions, but he may be greedy, selfish, self-considering, proud, and pride is worse than any sin that stalks about the city in the night-time. We condemn sin at wrong points, or we exaggerate some sins and practise others. Hence the beauty, the force, the necessity, of the expression or commandment, "Put on the whole armour." Every inch of it, be equally strong at every point; ay, and it will take thee all thy time to panoply thyself in the steel of God. The Christian life is a hard life; when it is otherwise it is not the life Christian. Jesus Christ laid down this condition at the very first; He said, The badge of all our tribe is a Cross; every man must bear his own cross, every man must carry the cross at the heavy end. Except a man carry his cross daily he cannot be My disciple; he may have some kind of unpractical admiration of Me, he may even say very fine and attractive things about Me, but he knows nothing about My salvation; that salvation represents a garden of agony, a cross of shame, a brand of dishonour in the eyes of the world. Who then can be saved? That is no question for us; that is not our inquiry. When we do put it in our heat and ignor-

ance Jesus says, Strive ye to enter in at the strait gate; do not inquire how many people can get in at the strait gate and walk along the narrow road, but strive ye, every one of you, as if ye were the only creature in the universe to enter and to walk along and to fight the devil day by day. What wonder that the Christian religion is not popular, and that Jesus Christ is at the foot of the list of the religions of the world? Herein is that saying true, He that is first shall be last, and he that is last shall be first. The statistical tables will be reversed and are being reversed with every process of the sun.

If we look at this panoplied man we shall find that he is a living parable. Many written parables have fascinated our imagination and delighted our hearts, and even comforted our hearts in times of sore distress, but here is an incarnate parable, a living picture of the complete man. Everything upon the Christian man has a meaning. We know what this is in ecclesiastical attire. It is foolish to mock such attire and to ignore its possible and even holy symbolism. You inquire the meaning of this part of the apparel, and the explanation is given to you. It is symbolic; it is nothing in itself, and if it were taken away from the rest of the attire what would it be but a piece of cloth or linen, or silken ribbon, or dumb drapery? But set in its place, interpreted by the truly ecclesiastical genius, it has a meaning, and a meaning not to be despised; but if the meaning be exaggerated or misplaced, then it will become an offence. The captain of the ship will tell you, as I have heard him say, Every passenger who comes near me when I am standing looking over the sea says, What is the meaning of this chain, captain? what is the meaning of this arrangement for turning the machinery? The captain may well get wearied and tired of answering such questions, for they occur day by day, and on every voyage, on the voyage out and on the voyage in; the same ignorance asks the same questions and the same petulance gives the same keen and almost resentful or uncivil replies. Carry the idea up to its highest levels and meanings, and the signification is this, that everything that is provided for the Christian's attire or accoutrement is sym-

bolical, is a sign, so that the man thoroughly equipped for the fight is a living parable read by well-trained eyes. The parables flush with beauty, listen to them as a voice, they tremble with ineffable music. We are much too material in our construction of things. Of course we have signed a very serious article of religious confession against materialism, and having signed the clause condemning materialism we go out and practise it. So many people get rid of things by signing them away. Many persons would be very religious if their signature could be accepted as a sacrifice. That is where the point of agony occurs. If by signing any number of credenda we could be enrolled as Christians we would sign at once ; we are always prepared to sign, and we are exceedingly hard upon the man who will not attach his signature to the same credenda. But signing is not crucifixion, and except a man take up his cross—not write his name—he cannot be My disciple. Christianity is known by its hands and its side; no wound-prints there, must mean no Christ in the heart. Of course this doctrine will empty the churches ; praised be God, it will drive people away who ought never to have been there. But if some remain they will be of the real quality, and the real quality is always in the majority ; not in a majority numerical, but in a majority spiritually energetic, influential, and sovereign.

It is wonderful in reading over this panoply to discover how much of it is meant for defensive purposes. It is not all meant for aggression. Christianity is both aggressive and defensive. It is astonishing, I repeat, how much of the Christian armour is for purposes defensive. The helmet does not fight, it protects ; the shield does not aggress, it secures, defends, protects the very heart of the warrior. We need a great deal of defensive armour. The devil is wily. If there is one little heel spot missed in the Christian Achilles that little vulnerable heel will be found out and some great assault will be made upon it ; mayhap the injection of some deadly poison ; and injections are not accompanied with noise or with an uproar that is supposed to betoken heroism and angry strife ; injection may be silent. The morphia is inserted with hardly any sense of pain, the digitalis

makes no noise when it gets into the life and helps the poor labouring breath. So there are many noiseless temptations, there are many assaults that are not suspected; and therefore this saying is true, What I say unto one I say unto all, Watch; resist the devil, and he will flee from you. But to be called to all this arming and watching and fighting and agonising expectancy, is this the way to life eternal? Yes, and other way there is none.

It is very noticeable that a great deal of this combat is what may be called hand-to-hand strife. It is not a discharge of ball and other missile over a space of miles; it is wrestling. Two men do not wrestle when they are standing five miles apart, nor a mile apart, nor a yard apart. It is when they are grappling, one with the other, seeking for the tightest place, watching every movement of the antagonist, anticipating and discounting it; the uplifting that there may be the downcasting. Sometimes the Christian warfare is just as hand-to-hand and arm-to-arm as this. Jacob wrestled; we speak and sing of wrestling Jacob. The record says, "Now there wrestled with him," and the wrestlers were so near to one another that the one touched the thigh of the other, and it shrank, and the muscle shrunken abides there till this day to tell what angel tussles there have been in the dark nights of spiritual experience.

It is not enough to watch the agonies which other men undergo. We cannot always follow even our own brother into the dark Gethsemane. Every man must fight his own battle. We can help him up to a given point. It is the same with what men call grizzly, gruesome, cruel death. You can accompany a sufferer it may be in some cases up to the very last half-hour, or the last fifteen minutes, or the last five minutes, but he must go the rest alone. No two souls ever go together within a certain compass of time; it may be shorter, it may be longer, but there is a period in which the whole action becomes solitary; there is no discharge in that war. There is apart from Christian sympathy and succour but one relief I have ever found, and that relief is this, that I too must go alone; that is a relief. How easy to die! how hard to live!

How delightful to breathe the last breath away! how terrible to turn from the chamber in which the victory has been won and to go out into some other room desolate with unutterable misery! And as in the hour and article of death there is this hand-to-hand wrestling with the great foe, so all through life there are days when nobody can be with us, hours when we are most social when we are most lonesome, strange grey times when our dearest surviving friend would hurt us by the very breath that is balmy with blessing. So we find in this great combat the lonely hour, the sacred strife, the contest that has not help given to it except from God; and God is most when we need Him most.

Is this armour all to be turned against the enemy? No; it is to be turned, so to say, but to say it with tenderest reverence, sometimes against God. How so? The proof is here: Having equipped yourselves, then follows the command or exhortation, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Does the Lord make an armoury that can be employed against Himself? Yes, in a certain sense, but that sense must be very carefully and even tenderly distinguished and discriminated. The action is this: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." And God, having armed the men, says, Now come and take My kingdom. God is willing to be overthrown. The angel was willing that Jacob should throw him as it were in some great struggle. This is part of the condescension of the divine mercy. Sometimes a father wants even baby to deal some heavy blow of tenderness upon him; he means to yield only to force in a certain construction of that term. And God says, Now that I have given you the whole armour, the entire panoply, now come and let us fight, and you shall win, you shall overthrow Me in the agony of prayer. Do not go to God to fight Him in your own strength and in your own panoply, and say, Now I have made ample preparation for taking the fort of heaven. No man can ever take the celestial fort; it must be surrendered by God in answer to prayer. He waits to be gracious, He waits for you to take it; He says, Come and prove

the armour with which I have clothed you; prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord, and see if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, river upon river, until you are not able to receive it. He clothes us with armour that we may, so to say, violate His very presence. He waits to be violated. He watches the whole movement. He loves His children. He loves them to win in the great contention.

PRAYER.

O LORD GOD OF HOSTS, we think of those who are engaged in war and all its trouble and sorrow, and of those who, being at home, are yet not away from the field of battle, thinking of husband, and father, and son; and we pray for all who are engaged in conflict on the one side or on the other. They are all made in the image and likeness of God; they have all great heartaches and miseries. The Lord stop the war; the Lord put an end to the murder of men; the Lord Himself undertake the case and handle it for us, for in our ignorance and in our weakness on both sides we are unable to do this business. God of the nations, hear us, we humbly pray Thee, whilst we gather at the Cross. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Heavenly Father, the fellowship and comfort of the Holy Ghost abide with us evermore! Amen.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, will it please Thee in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour to meet us in Thine own house, before Thine own altar, and within the shadow of the one Cross? We need some such meeting, for our hearts are aching with grief, and our lives are overshadowed by threatening clouds. Wherein we have been frivolous and self-sufficient, let the Lord have mercy upon us and turn our hearts to soberness of thought, to religious considerateness, so that we may know our way and our standing before the Lord. We have done grievously, and grievous is the harvest of our doing; we knew it was bad seed we were sowing in God's field, and now we have to reap and to consume the poison. God is not mocked, Thy law abides amid all the changes of incident and circumstance; the way of the Lord cannot be hindered: whatsoever a man or a nation soweth, so shall the reaping be. For a time we think we have deluded God, and behold, Thou wast waiting for us with an uplifted sword, and Thou hast smitten us sorely and proved that we are but frailest men. The Lord help us to read the lesson well, to ponder it deeply, and to apply it fearlessly; then out of repentance and broken-heartedness the summer of Thy love shall return, and all the sky will be cloudless. Thou hast an appointed way, and an appointed time, and an appointed house: who are we that we should sin against God with a lofty hand and escape all the divine judgments? Behold, Thou art inflicting great suffering; it would be cruel if we did not deserve it; Thou hast thrown down our idols, and Thou hast taken Thyself and Thy smile away from us, and now life is cold and desolate, and the country totters into ruins. We come before Thee with humbleness of mind, with utterest self-humiliation, and say, one and all, as a man, as a family, as a people, We have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done. If Thou hast shattered our pride, we deserved it; if Thou hast torn our nest to pieces and scattered it on the flying wind, behold, did we not provoke the Lord to this instance of helping and healing wrath? Dost Thou not destroy that Thou mayest reconstruct? and are there not more houses still and larger into which our souls can flee?

We have been fools before God, we have betaken ourselves to holiday-making and to recreation and to pleasure and to self-indulgence, and have never named the name of God. O pity the foolish people! pity the nation that has kept its catechism and lost its faith! Behold, we stand before God who can hardly stand because of loss of strength. This we say individually: for Thou hast turned our house upside down and poured Thy snow upon its central fire; and Thou hast taken the summer light from our window, and not a bird makes its voice heard in the forsaken garden. We say this as families: for we have turned out the Lord, and banished His book, and laughed at His ministries, and denied His providence. The Lord pity us! and then we shall become men again, and get back to the old discipline and faithfulness and reality of manhood, and then the Lord will arise for us and Zion shall be the comfort of the world. The Lord look upon us when we confess our sin, and the Lord mercifully hear us when we return thanks in feeble voices and hesitant hearts, it may be, for His mercy and His lovingkindness. Oh that we had hearkened unto Thy words! then the summer had never left the garden; oh that we had lived and nestled in the heart of God! and then the winter would be as the summer, and the long night a long sweet rest. I will arise and go to my Father! is the utterance of the prodigal nation, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in Thy sight, and am no more worthy that I should stand foremost amidst those who profess Thy name. Do not destroy us utterly, leave us a nail in Jerusalem; do not blow out the last wailing candle. God pity us, not only for our fathers' sake and the graves that make the jewels of the country, but pity us for Christ's sake, seeing that He redeemed the world with blood. The Lord comfort us exceedingly, wherein our hearts are sore, wherein our lot is difficult, wherein the cup Thou hast given us to drink is exceeding bitter. O Jesus, Lamb of God, hear each man when he says in his heart, Let me lean my little cross against the Tree on which Thou didst die! Amen.

LXIV.

HOW NOT TO PRAY.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 4TH, 1900.

"*Only this once.*"—JUDGES xvi. 28.

E have heard these words until we are heartsick of them. It seems as if such words could not be done without in the history of human experience. How words fall into base and false familiarity; how soon expressions lose their originality; how in a moment everything seems to become stale! Yet there are some words we cannot do without; we know they are lies, we mean them at the time, or at least we think we mean them; and lo, in a little while the remembrance utterly fades, and we come back upon the old spot with the old hammer, with a false repercussion, with a smiting that we promised should never be renewed.

Samson would gather himself up for a grand final effort; he said in effect, O Lord, the Philistines have taken away mine eyes, I am no longer what I was, I am no longer a prophet and servant of Thine, I am no longer a judge in the country, I am a poor fool; I gave up my secret, I was fallen upon by cruel wretches, they are laughing at me and mocking me with a most bitter sarcasm; Lord, remember the old days, direct my hands, some of you, to the pillars on which this house stands, and now, Lord, this once, the last time, give me back the old Samson, and I will tear these Philistines down as a palace might be torn down by an earthquake: Lord, this once, only this once; I pray Thee let the old strength come back, and I will be avenged for my two eyes. It was very natural, it was most human,

it was just what we would have done under similar circumstances, and therefore do not let us laugh at the dismantled giant.

Let us accommodate the passage, so that it may become a lamp which we can hold over various points of life.

"Only this once": forgive me, I will never ask it again, this is the very last time; I have no excuse, I did the evil deed, I wrought the deed of shame, I spoke the false word, but I am getting old, and I shall not trouble my family much more or much longer; give me the final pardon; I seem as if I could not do without it; it seems as if I had it I would die easily and triumphantly; I do not deserve it, but add one more to your forbearances and your gentle judgments and your soft-hearted acts of true clemency and pity; I will never ask again, but pardon me this one time. You know that speech; it is now a stale speech in your ears; you have pardoned seventy times seven, and another pardon is requested with the promise that it shall be the last. You know it, in the case of your son, your daughter, your best friend, the life from which you hoped the most, and that life has come in with its last and last and last, until you have proved it to be a lie. Is it not so with ourselves? Ought not the remembrance that this is a self-accusation to moderate our judgment of others? This is the very thing we have done in the case of the divine Creator and Redeemer of the worlds; we have told Him that we would never repeat the sin. He asks us to repeat the necessity, He loves, He lives to give; we cannot go to Him too frequently with our hunger and our thirst; He says, Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. It is not of our necessity we go again, but for the very self-same sin we did last week, and we will do to-morrow. Life is critical. I am sure I thought I would never do it again, I did in my very heart's heart; I said this shall not occur again; then I told a blacker lie than ever, and put myself more thoroughly into the devil's service, and I found after revelling a whole night with the devil and awakening with a tormenting headache, that it was the headache I was sorry for, not the

broken law. If I could have awakened with all my passions still alive and still in their acutest state of sensibility I never would have prayed; but when a man is self-hit, self-scourged, and so to say, strange as the paradox may appear, downtrodden by himself, he will say anything, he will endeavour to impose upon Omniscience. There is no telling what a fool a man may be. Do not mock at the other man; this is no animadversion upon other people, it is first and foremost a grinding of the speaker's own heart to powder, to dust. Do not think of the other man, say to your own heart, looking so to say straight into it, It is you—coward, false soul!—it is you that I am speaking to.

And then we have it again in the daily cry from familiar voices, Deliver me out of this perplexity only this once, no more; I will never ask for deliverance again, I will take the literal consequences: nay, I will pray to go to hell rather than come back to be delivered. And the fool means it; he thinks he will be brave next time; the dog that has in theory died upon a hundred dunghills will come back that he may perish where he has often perished before. You know this in your own family, in your own soul, in your own son, daughter, fastest friend. Only this once, this other ten pounds, this other acceptance of a bill; this once screen me, and I will never, never return. You know the cry. Which of us has not in his desk a hundred promises that this shall be the last solicitation of love? So we have not fallen upon some out-of-the-way text, we have come squarely down upon a common experience; nay, not common only, but universal, beginning with every man's own self. You have said so to God; many a time I have said so with a lion's confidence, with a face uplifted so often to the heavens that it has forgotten the art of blushing. We say again and again, Lord, let Thy providence help me in this case, only this once; this is really the final perplexity of my life; I am very ill, and I am afraid of the other world; I have suffered much on account of it in a dream but yesternight; I saw the unveiling of the invisible world, I heard the groanings of the lost, in my dream I saw thousands of men mad, lost, could not find their way

back again, walking in circles when they thought they were walking in straight lines; I heard the cry for water, and the water had fled away. I do not want to die just now; if Thou wilt give the doctor great success and turn the herbal medicines of the field into sacramental wine, I will never grieve Thee more; only this once! and I promised God many things; I said I would love His Church, I would support His altar, I would vindicate the Cross; I would take up a new line and become a new man if He would but relieve me this once. He did, and the devil has never had a sturdier soldier. Oh the pity of it! the utter, utter sadness of it! What wonder if there runs through the whole Bible the wail, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"? We would rebuke the other man if the way were not barred by self-accusation.

Now let us note three things about this prayer. First of all, the prayer was to the true God. It was not offered to an idol or to a graven image of any kind or to a mere filmy ideality, a shadowy half-something that was wraith-like, apparitional, but not nameable or not approachable in any suitable and substantial way. This prayer went up directly in the line of the true throne. It was the Lord God of Israel, it was the cry of necessity to the Giver of all good. Know then that we may be praying to the right God; that is no guarantee that we shall get the answer which we desire. You may read the right book and get nothing out of it. Not every man who reads the Bible receives a revelation, or has the slightest idea that there is a revelation of a spiritual and effective kind in the whole range of holy Scripture. Hear what the man will say: I am sure I have done my best; I have taken down the Bible, I have turned over its leaves, I have punctuated its beautiful literature with scalding tears, and I have prayed almost all night, and I prayed to God the Father in the name of God the Son; and this morning I feel no deliverance. The right God does not make the right prayer; the prayer is in the spirit, in the will, it is in the temper or disposition of the heart; it is in the self-crucifixion of the soul: not a cry, but a sacrifice.

What ailed this poor prayer? what was its mortal disease? The mortal disease of this prayer uttered by Samson was that it was offered in the wrong spirit. It is the spirit that determines the quality. "That I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." It was a prayer for vengeance. That prayer comes easily to the natural spirit. We love to magnify the individual, and to think that individualism is personality. What grave mistakes we make in our verbal definitions! A man will say that he stands up for personality, when he knows nothing about it. He is standing up for individuality, his own little miserable self. Personality is an inclusive term, bringing with it sovereign rights on which God will bestow sovereign recognitions. Do not imagine that when you magnify your individuality you are maintaining the doctrine of personality. Personality is a wide and pregnant term, connoting and consolidating many diverse elements and making of them one temple-like unity, having one divine purpose. Here is a man who comes forward to avenge his personal or individual or physical loss; in that spirit a man cannot pray. What he says may have the form of prayer, so to say the likeness of prayer, and may have about it something of the shape and tone of prayer as it might be uttered in a church and under holy environments and circumstances, and yet the man may not be praying, he may be in reality simply and deeply cursing. You can pray prayerlessly; you can have a creed without having any faith; you may shut yourself up within the mechanical forces and all their applications, and yet not know that you yourself are carried about in divers circles by a law which mechanics cannot touch, much less rearrange or modify. A curse is not a prayer; an imprecation is not part of the great liturgy in which all redeemed souls ought to take part, and are called upon as a solemn obligation to take part. Herein is it true that aspiration is not prayer. There are many people who are perfectly willing to aspire who are not willing to pray. Prayer is self-slaughter, in so far as the will and the supreme desire of the heart may be concerned. Prayer is self-renunciation; prayer says, Lord, Thy will be done, not mine. Thus the divine will is done by consent human

and divine, and is the law, in its own degree of the universe; the soul then falls into the rhythmic movement of the creation, and the man is translated out of individuality into personality in its broadest definitions, and he is part and parcel of the great unity which swings like a censer round the altar divine.

In the third place this prayer was answered, but answered in judgment. Samson had his way, but his way killed him. God has many ways of answering prayer. One sad case is recorded which will at once occur to your memory: "He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." They had their way, and lost it; they got what they wanted, and it poisoned them; they turned the egg which they coveted into the scorpion which stung them to death. How marvellous it is in all this process that Samson still had within him what I may call a spark of vital faith. He knew he had lost his opportunities, and forfeited his privileges, and betrayed his trust; yet he knew something higher than all this, namely, that God lives, and that God is a God of judgment, and that the way of God shall yet prevail upon the earth, be human circumstances and conditions what they may. He made the most of that vital spark; he could have described himself as Peter described himself on another occasion: Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that—bad as I am, deserving of damnation as I am, having committed the unpardonable blasphemy, having set myself at the head of the traitors of creation—Thou knowest that Peter loves Thee. But Samson might have said, Do not upbraid me; I have played the fool before God, I yielded up my secret, I parted with my strength, I ceased at once to be a judge in Israel and to be a child of God; but there is one last lingering flash of faith, and I want to turn that last lingering flash into works, into actions, into palpable and crushing results. Samson was then at the very height of his will; he then touched the sublimest personality of his own consciousness, and he was dealing not only with his enemies, but with the enemies of the Lord—bigger enemies than Samson realised them to be—and he tore down the pillars, and killed more in his death than in his life. We will not say anything about Samson's character, we have too much to say about our own;

it does not do to stretch our hands across the centuries that we may smite some downtrodden man, but we must begin at the house of God. The judgment must begin in every man's own secret soul. But this we may say; for the eternal comfort of the race it is written according to the blessing pronounced by father Jacob, "Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last." So we come upon the familiar thought of intermediate and final victories. Gad, my poor, poor son, a troop shall overcome him, but he, my son Gad, shall overcome at the last. When they think he is dead he will spring to his feet; when they report it in pagan uncircumcised cities that Gad is dead, Gad will rise and whet his sword and challenge the enemy to a deadlier combat. Do not pronounce upon intermediate failures; there may be many of them, and yet there may be conquest at the last.

So it shall be with our poor hearts. Yes, we were caught in all the sins; the decalogue was flying round us in splintered, shattered pieces, the devil was triumphing over us, but we overcame at the last. It was a long time in coming, but the purpose of God cannot be set aside, and if we diligently, humbly, and reverently entreat the divine presence, and if we be heartily ashamed of our sins, and name them one by one in the face of the noonday sun, and smite upon our hearts and say, "All these sins are ours, and we repent them," who can tell whether God will be gracious unto us, and give us a nail in His tabernacle, and one small place in His great providential plan? We have sinned, we have done the things we ought not to have done. As a nation we have sinned; I do not see that our cup of iniquity could hold one drop more; with the West of London as a consolidated Sodom and Gomorrah, with corruption in high places chargeable, and justly chargeable, with every form of iniquity and pestilent misbehaviour, it is not for us to fall back upon a history we have dishonoured, it is for us to go forward to a throne that is still a throne of mercy. We are not to be ashamed to confess our sins in the face of the nations. God will see to the answer to such confession. Do not talk about pride and self-respect and conscious loss of dignity. Lose your dignity, but save your souls!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, all things are in Thine hands, and we rejoice in Thy gracious sovereignty. Thou dost appoint men their places, their goings out and their comings in, yea, their risings up and their sittings down; it is all of Thy doing and all under Thy oversight, and our hearts when they are sober are also glad. Thou dost permit us to tell what we would like, and Thou dost rebuke the prayer while yet it trembles on our lips. We have learned to know that this is best. Once we thought Thee hostile; now we know that rebuking is part of Thy love, that anger is an aspect of the Divine solicitude. We are poor scholars, and dull at the best, and we complain that the light is poor and will not permit us to see all Thy writing; we blame Thee when we should blame ourselves; we are borne before the wind of our own ignorance when we should lie down at the feet of God and humbly cry, Thy will be done. But Thou knowest our frame, Thou rememberest that we are dust, a wind that cometh for a little time, and then passeth away; Thou wilt not batter us down by Thy thunder or dazzle us by Thy sudden lightning. We are but men, partly dust, and partly inspired by Thyself, yea, in some degree we are in the image and likeness of God. It is so wonderful, so distressing, so full of tragedy and awful pain. Yet Thou hast given us some power of dreaming and hoping, and seeing in the dark, and marking the outline of wraiths and spectres and strange filmy things. Oh that we could rest in God through Jesus Christ our Lord; oh that we could simply throw down our burden at Thy feet or wait for the strengthening of our back that we might bear it with less difficulty! The Lord be pleased to hear us in all the utterance of our desire after completer resignation, deeper, tenderer submission to the Divine will; then time shall be nothing and succession shall be unknown, and we shall be as those who are unclothed and wait upon Thee in the invisible and the eternal. As we pray at the Cross we pray in confidence, and we mention our sin that we may forget it or remember that where sin abounds grace doth much more abound, and in the name of the blood of the Son of God we cry for pardon; for we have done the things that we ought not to have done, and we have left undone the things that we ought to have done, and we say from our hearts in trembling and in awe, God be merciful to every sinner! Amen.

LXV.

PRAYERS THAT MUST CEASE.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 8TH, 1900.

"*Speak no more unto Me of this matter.*"—DEUT. iii. 26.

"THE prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." There are prayers that must not be prolonged. We have wearied God, we are talking unwisely to Him; we think we are praying when we are only aggravating Divine providence; it would be the supreme mercy if we could only learn to hold our tongue. It is as if God had said, We have had enough of this matter; this is mere ignorance or selfishness; this is no piety, it is anything but piety; thou art now talking wordily and ineffectively, and nothing can follow such talk as this but bitter disappointment; drop it! This is a great and blessed mystery in the Divine sovereignty and providence of the world. Some people you cannot get to be still; your only hope of partial safety is in not allowing them to begin; by all means prevent them from opening their lips; if you once permit them to begin, they will never imagine that it can be possible that you would wish them to end.

A remarkable instance is that of Moses. There was a longing in his courageous, kingly old heart to go over and to go into the land. "I pray Thee let me go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain and Lebanon; I have had a long hard time of it; who could repeat the miserable experience I have had with this wild, unchastened Israel? Do let me go over and see the end of it all, which shall also be the beginning of it all, as sunset seems to hide in its radiant heart white and glorious sunrise." The Lord said in effect: Moses,

we have had enough of this; let there be no whining and no continuance of this poor mean prayer; speak no more to Me of this matter; the arrangement is complete and final; fall into My hands, having first encouraged Joshua, thy successor, who has not done one hundredth part of thy work; but I have a meaning in this; speak no more about it. Hence we come almost abruptly upon the subject of stifled prayers, prayers cut right in two, a most tragic and heart-paining bisection of our prayer. We thought we might talk always to God, but herein we are rebuked; we have been offering, mayhap, poor prayers, mean, worthless, superstitious or superficial prayers; we have not gone deeply down into the root and life of the matter; and God seems to say, For My sake, drop it; speak no more about it. "The Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me," would not hear even me after this lifetime of priestly solicitude and fatherly intercession. Thus we are driven to consider whether there may not be some prayers that ought not to be prayed, and thus we are further driven to consider whether we may not have sinned in prayer; for if some people begin there is no getting rid of them any more. Oh for the genius of silence! oh for the prayer that often has no words, a great dumb, piteous look that says nothing, but leaves everything, Canaan and all its beauties, to the decision of the sweet, tender, all-loving Father-Mother. It is difficult for some people to think they can pray if they do not talk. Prayer is not understood; it is supposed to be a little process in mendicancy, a sort of occupation of a poor blind man seated at the roadside and holding out a hand. It is prayer that is not understood. It would be well for us if we could stifle some of our prayers. We say in the sanctuary of an unbroken silence, I would like to go over, I should very much like to see him, her, it, the man, the woman, the city; I should greatly like to gather a plenteous crop of that field on which I have bestowed so much pains; I would like to see God if He would but shapen Himself into visibleness. We may say all that if we will only undertake to choke it down and never let even a dog hear that we have committed such foolishness, trembling on blasphemy.

What are the prayers which ought to be stifled, and of which God wishes to hear nothing more? They are selfish or self-considering prayers, which never find their way into heaven. No nail could carry them up so high, no eagle-nail so strong in pinion could lift up the burden of such worthless prayers to the threshold of heaven. They are self-considering, they are little peddling, meddling prayers, utterances of ignorance and self-concern. The greatest men in the Church have sometimes prayed such prayers, and God has in His own way rebuked them; sometimes quite sharply, at other times with a hesitating anger as if it would rather turn into love than proceed into deprecation and denial. Yet there is the great principle, that some of our prayers are like dead birds that fall because they bruise themselves against the ceiling without ever getting out into the fresh air, much less winging their flight into the blue sky. For example, here is Moses saying, "Let me go over." He is so little as that! After all his Herculean labours, after all the experience of an unprecedented life, he wants just one last little sweetmeat. He is very old; I think I should have granted the prayer, because I am as old and feeble and poor as Moses at his worst. But God would not hear it; God had other ideas and purposes. I think all the Church would have said, Moses must pass over; surely he must pass over first, surely he must pass over amid resounding bands of triumphal music, and all Israel must go mad with joy when the old man sets his feet on the green sward of Canaan. We have many programmes which God does not countersign; we are fecundant in the manufacture of suggestions and programmes. We can make programmes without ever wetting our feet; we can sit at our own fireside and dream programmes and write out a list of new year's honours and distribute them with quite royal bounty; but God says when we have finished the programmes and handed them up for the divine signature, No more of this; I have had enough of this; this is not the right way. Oh, what things God does! He will kill an old man, He will thrust the last dart through the very soul of His most faithful servant; He will be cruel if we measure Him only by a foot rule or by such space as the naked eye can encompass. We must wait for the revelation, the result, the last beam of

light, and then mayhap it may be seen even by Moses that it was better to be buried on Nebo than to be a pioneer in Canaan. Leave God to work out the chastening and perfecting of our character. That is piety, though the price may be a furnace, or a cross.

And Elijah had his little prayer. Elijah thought he would live on his own resources, and Elijah came to partial, to intermediate, but not final ruin. Said the old grand prophet: Release Thy servant; I have had a long, weary, exhausting day; I seem to fall asleep over my work, I who was once so alert that the night had difficulty in conquering me and subduing me into slumber; I nod at noonday and fall asleep when I ought to be at my very busiest engagement and exercise; Lord, release me, for I am tired. And the Lord rebuked him, and said He would hear no more of such praying; that the fire had gone out of the prayer, and the altar held nothing but cold white ashes; and the Lord took other means of refreshing the exhausted prophet and recalling the long gone youth of his soul: Arise, eat, speak the word that I shall tell thee, and if it will encourage thy poor old heart to know that thou art not alone, then be it known to thee, thou son of flame, that I have seven thousand men, who despise Baal and will not kiss his impotent hand.

Then we find Paul praying just the same kind of useless and fear-burdened and fear-shadowed prayer: I prayed the Lord Christ that He would take away the thorn; no thorn in history was so long and so sharp as mine, and it pierced its way through as if into the very centre of my heart, and I said once and twice and thrice, Lord, remove this cruel thorn, and He would not, He specifically declined to remove the thing that was killing me; but He said, My grace is sufficient for thee, and until that hour I never knew the meaning of the word sufficient: I felt I could bear a thousand thorns, and in the strength of that assurance I rose, and almost challenged the thorns to tear me, and let my blood flow out in a libation of love to God. How fond we are of these little self-regarding prayers! One of the things we shall have to repent of some day, when we are bigger and wiser souls, will be our prayers.

We argued before the throne so poorly; we dragged our poor little selves into God's sight, as it were, and said, See this emaciated life, and pity it, and give it decent burial even in the wilderness; only let me get rid of it, it is so like what I think hell must be. To repent of our prayers, to recall the paltry intercessions of our ignorance and our poverty—who can enter into the mystery of that experience? May God give us time for obliteration; the Lord enable us to have a sufficient number of days in which to erase our prayers; oh for the rubber that can get at that mean ink and drink it out so that God Himself, were it possible, should not see again the tracing of our mean, graceless hands.

Then, secondly, there are prayers that minister subtly but surely to intellectual or social vanity. A man will set himself to pray for knowledge of the future. The future has always been fascinating to a certain type of imagination. If we could only find out, without other people being also able to find out, what is coming to-morrow! There is a field for fancy! Can we not devise some method of pea-counting or stone-carving or wood-carving or sign-making by which we could report the morrow? These poor, occasionally lying boys that call out to-day's paper—if one could rise and call out with confidence and with adequate proof of his veracity to-morrow's paper! It looks as if it would do no harm if we could see into the mystery called to-morrow; but it would do nothing but harm. A day at a time is enough for us; we know our own intellectual vanity and self-ishness well enough to know that it is better for us to be sent home in the evenings and shut up in the security or even in the dungeon of darkness. Yet if you analyse human mind and action you will probably discover that the most of people are living in to-morrow; they are not the less certainly living in it that they are not aware of the fact. In a certain sense it is perfectly right that we should live in the future, but with resignation, with confession of ignorance and dependence, with constant looking to the Divine hands for guidance and to the Divine eye for light. Thus it is that posterity draws us on, strange as the paradox may appear while it lingers in mere words; it is to-morrow that helps us to live to-day, it is heaven that makes earth

tolerable. Yet we are here on delicate ground, we must take care, we must not press the Lord too far; He will give us just as much time as is useful to us or can be turned to useful purposes in the interests of others. The longing, this desire to penetrate the future, is the desire to succeed in intellectual speculation, the desire to get the newest view, the unheard-of interpretation, the set of combinations that will produce a totally variant condition of historical development and social responsibility; to be delivered from ignorance, to have a secret key opening into secret places, to be enabled to enter into sanctuaries from which the general mass of mankind may be considered to be excluded; to have special certificates and special endorsements and professional dignities and professional remunerations, solaces, and rewards; to constitute ourselves into classes so that we can exclude a large number of persons, in which the high priest is the Pharisee who is not as other men, certainly not as this publican. The Lord will not hear us; when He does admit anybody into His more secret chambers it is the babe. What babe ever took up any room, or were we not so fond of the babe that we imagined it occupied no place at all, but was just as welcome as a sunbeam and as little likely to incommode us in the matter of space? "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." "Of such is the kingdom of heaven"; that is my reason for baptising them; that is all the certificate I want. I do not write to any registrar to ask him how old this baby is, because I know the older he is the worse he is. "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." They brought their little children, and in all time little children have either given us the secret of God or have largely been the medium through which we have in some way, ideal, poetic, literal, received the seals of the kingdom. Lord, make us babe-like; give us the child-heart, and seize us whilst we are thus remade young before we have time to make fools of ourselves and heretics!

There are prayers that do not involve thorough renewal and submission of heart; they are anecdote prayers, little pottering prayers about fine days and fine harvests and rain and divers little comforts that are

specially and locally desired and needed; it will require all the grace of God to turn these whinings into real and effectual prayers. There is no prayer worth praying that does not aim at the submission of the human will to the divine—"Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done." That is true prayer, and prayer, we have often said, that is always and necessarily, when offered in the right spirit, answered and glorified. We may make our prayers sources of profit, or we may regard them, not altogether with frank outspokenness, but with deep, secret, subtle intent, as a species of investment. Some of us have been guilty of this. It is a mean but ever-disappointing exercise and attempt to enlist God on our side. We cannot get away from the notion that God is specially interested in us at the expense of some other man. You cannot eradicate out of this heart of yours the notion that God has a special liking for you and your parish and neighbourhood and country: God will be sure to hear the Briton. Is He not the God of the Boer as well as the God of the Briton? is He not the God of the Briton as well as the Boer? Does He reign in His heaven to make paltry distinctions amongst the people who owe themselves to His creative power and providential care? Beware how you make selfish prayers, investing prayers, profit-seeking prayers.

I must say, though at the risk of incurring disrepute, if not hostility, which I despise, that the debate the other night in the House of Commons upon the condition of affairs made me sore and sick at heart. It was a mean debate on both sides, a paltry, worthless, atheistic debate, unworthy of the occasion, unworthy of the awful tragedy that is involved, unworthy of a proper appreciation of the broken hearts on both sides, occasioned by this diabolic bloodshed. In the debate there was not a religious voice heard in the whole utterance, but one. The greatest speech of the debate was in one word. It was made by Mr. Healy, one of the brightest intellects of the century. When challenged to say to whom are the Boers looking for support, he said, "God." It did my heart good—poor, old, withered, disappointed heart—to hear that sacred word. They should have turned the Houses of Parliament into a sanctuary when they debated upon action that

involves the making of thousands, if not tens of thousands, of widows and orphans and desolated homes. They might have discussed the matter as politicians *plus* Christian citizens and Christian believers. If a man of weight and authority had stood up there and said, with the fervour of a man hardly dead yet, a memory and an inspiration still, "We do not love war, we hate war, we feel that we have been driven into a combination of circumstances in which war is more or less inevitable and unavoidable, but we say to Boer and to Briton, we want the war honourably and righteously ended," that man's words would have rung round the earth and have awakened a response that would have had happy results. What cavilling! what neat little essays, grammatically correct, small-boy exercises in English composition, little nagglings one with the other, assurances that if something had been done on Wednesday instead of being done on the previous Saturday, then the Government would have been worthy of confidence! But I look in vain for grand, fundamental, all-encompassing principles, and an enthusiasm so religious that it must have affected hearts in England, in Africa, and in every other part of the world.

These are the prayers that I do not care for, namely, the ordered prayers and the scheduled prayers and the atheistic debates, and the great care so to speak as not to mention the name of the Ruler of the universe. Brethren, I was ashamed of it all, on both sides, as mean, inhuman, contemptible, disastrous. I will not have it therefore that human nature belongs either to this country or to that country exclusively and specially. God is no respecter of persons; in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of the Almighty Father. We must broaden our petitions, and become more human that we may become more divine. Then let us leave our prayers, and if we have offended God by ignorant desires and superficial intercessions and supplications, let us clothe ourselves in sackcloth and ashes. For my part I do not hesitate to pray for all classes and conditions of men, for all foreigners so-called, for all heathen and pagan nations, and I look upon the whole population of the globe as the children of God. To charge God with

partiality is to degrade Him. God is no respecter of persons, but He is a respecter of character, He respects righteousness, obedience, virtue, purity, self-sacrifice; and He accepts these as certainly from the Boer as from the Briton, as certainly from the Malagasy as from the Red Indian, as certainly from the civilisation of Europe as from the heathenism of the islands of the sea. Surely better days are coming, surely we shall drive out all these politicians and only readmit them on proof of character. I pray God to dissolve both Houses of Parliament, and never to reconstruct them except on a basis of a love of righteousness and adequate proofs of Christian intelligence. I do not want mere politics-mongering; I want humanity, the next word below divinity. My dear friends, I do not care one iota whether you applaud me or dissent from me, except in the degree that I am always pleased when great principles are preferred to petty policies.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we are still in great distress as a nation. The air is full of the tones of misery: the widow and the orphan cry to Thee; desolated families lift up their eyes to the heavens in the hope that they may find help there. We leave ourselves in Thy hand. Wherein we have done wrong may we repent as in sackcloth and ashes; wherein we are guilty may we be humbled even to the deepest point of humiliation. But having repented of our sin we would endeavour to lift up our hearts to Thee, in the hope that even yet we may not be crushed by Thy great power. Make us right, that we may be made strong; or if we are not right, do Thou break our pride and raise us up again in Thine own time out of the ashes of our humiliation. Meanwhile, the women and children, and the fathers and the mothers, old and sad-hearted, what is to be done with them? They will not be forgotten by Thy love; to Thy tender care and pity we lovingly commend them in the name of Jesus Christ, who spake as never man spake. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Heavenly Father, the fellowship and comfort of the Holy Ghost abide with us, till the end comes which brings the beginning. Amen.

PRAYER.

THY people cry unto Thee, O God, in the name of Jesus Christ their Saviour, humbly desiring to offer Thee some gift of praise in return for Thy boundless mercy and most loving kindness. It is in their hearts to be grateful: how can they be false in presence of all Thou hast done for them in Thy blessed and most merciful providence? Sometimes we give ourselves to review, we go back to our earliest days, watch Thee taking us into Thine arms and guiding us and upholding and protecting us according to our necessity; then our hearts glow within us; we say, Surely the Lord who hath brought us thus far will take us still further and bring to happy issue all His thoughts and purposes concerning us. We turn our eyes to the Cross and see all Thy love there; that is the heart of God; we see it bleed for us, and we hear the gentle, gracious voice which says, The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin; and herein is that saying true, There is a fountain opened in the house of David for sin and uncleanness. Thou hast surrounded us with Thyself, with all the tokens of Thy presence and love; we would be blind of heart not to see them; sometimes we seem to see them altogether; then the floods lift up their voice and the thunders are raised to music, and we would praise the Lord with our whole breath and with all the fire of a redeemed life. We bless Thee for high religious emotion, for great depths of tenderness, for manifold and sustaining experience; sometimes we bring into our song the very furnace itself, and the great trial, and the forty days in the wilderness when we are face to face with the wild beasts. It is a wondrous life; it is Thine own doing, Thou Doer of all the true marvels. We say again and again as we reap the crop, This is the Lord's doing, this also cometh from the Lord of hosts, wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. Thou dost write Thy name on the fields, Thou dost sign each season as it comes and goes claiming it as Thine own and as a fulfilled covenant. Now we are with Thee in the wintertime, when we have to look upon the cold snow and feel the piercing wind; and we want to be able to say that God who made the summer made the winter also. Why should we not round off our song and the utterance of our trust? Why should we have but a partial faith or an occasional uplifting of the soul to God in Christ? Wilt Thou not be with us in our deepest consciousness all the year through, so that we shall sing our psalm in midwinter and our anthem when the summer is at its glowing height? Thou knowest that we are slow of heart and dull of understanding, and we bless Thee that Thou dost not

reject us though we are faint and feeble and our knees knock against one another as we half trust Thy providence. Forgive us our atheisms; they are partial and transient, but they are facts; oh! that we might be delivered from all negation and half trust and daring denial, and that we might wholly, absolutely throw our souls into Thy keeping, Shepherd of Israel, Redeemer of man. We commend one another tenderly to Thy care: those who are feeble and old, those who are sick of heart, and those who are weary of life and would gladly dig their grave in the snow. And we commend unto Thee those who are great-hearted, full of loving thoughts, seeking out the blind to lead them, and the lame to give them a lift on the rugged way. We bless Thee for sanctified riches, and for uncomplaining and trustful poverty, and for all the people who teach us great lessons in the field of labour, in the furnace of suffering, in the activities of daily life. The Lord be round our houses; who can rock the cradle but those who love Thee, Father of all? Be with the physician and with the nurse, with those who are weary of the day and wearier still of the night; be with hearts that are killed with anxiety, wondering what the next news will be, those whose very lives are shaken and tortured and most sorely tried. If the Lord will thus in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ hear our prayer and answer it, we shall not know this to be winter, but through the snow we shall see the warmer blossoms. Amen.

LXVI.

BY WHAT AUTHORITY?

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 11TH, 1900.

"*Shewing by the scriptures.*"—ACTS xviii. 28.

MAN must have some kind of authority. He must assume something; he must begin. The proof is not always in the beginning palpable and undeniable; the beginning contains the end, but until the end is reached we do not know the full value and true force of the beginning. What is there in all your life which does not rest upon an assumption? The whole scheme of life seems to rest upon some

airy, beautiful, fragile bubble. You think at a certain part of your process of life that you are acting upon definite proof and authority; but you are doing nothing of the kind; you are basing your whole selfhood upon an assumption. The very first line of your spiritual algebra reads: Let this or that symbol represent or in the meantime be equal to the unknown quantity of which we are constantly and sometimes peevishly in quest. You must have something, if it be no better or stronger than a cobweb, to begin with; the cobweb has to prove itself in a long process; in the first instance it must be assumed. Who are these that cry out so loudly for authority and write books upon it? Everything is its own authority, or there is none, and everything must prove its own authority or fall, or be nonsuited in the court of commonsense and true wisdom. If that could really be understood and applied, it would alter the whole face of things. We do not go far enough back, we take a great deal for granted which is not literally and verbally provable; but if we accept the assumptions, and so to say presume upon them and act as if they were true, we give them a chance to prove whether they are true or not. The poor algebraic x has a hard time of it in the first three or four lines of the equation; it is nobody, it is nothing, it is less than anonymous, it is a mere convenience, something to which something else may be attached; and the process goes on line by line, combination by combination, until the poor struggling humble x of the first line stands out in plain strong arithmetical figures at the last. Yet, in the process specially referred to, you could not have undertaken two lines without the x, which only assumed or represented something which it knew nothing about. Yet there are persons who are always asking for our authority. If that foolish question were permitted we should destroy the whole fabric of things. The assumption must prove itself; things are not done from the outside; all things worth doing are done from the inside. Those of us who are more foolish than others are looking far away for someone to come and prove something we are struggling with. The great voice from heaven says, Let the thing you are struggling with prove itself, or cast it out. So in the

Church and in the market-place and in the academy and in all the large schools of training, we are dealing absolutely with assumptions and with nothing else, until the assumptions work themselves into such combination and issues that we begin to feel the whole process to be ghostly, weird, spiritual, yet most substantial and invulnerable in practical logic. There are many persons who never become religious because they say, What is the authority?—as if the authority were outside, and had a postal address and must be approached by way of deputation. Everything has in it its own proof, or proof it has none. Upon that as Christian teachers and thinkers we venture without throb of heart-misgiving to build the whole Christian argument and appeal.

You cannot intellectually prove the existence of God, but you can prove it by living it. You must not go to the library for many learned books whereby the existence of God is logically established. God is in you, or to you He is not God. God comes through the consciousness; sometimes almost an argument, often a dream; sometimes a madness, a peculiar inexplicable process, and as the Apostle John says, we know that we know,—a double affirmation, and oftentimes without explanation in mere words. Do not be disturbed because some man, who was born stupid and will probably die insane, comes and asks you what is the seat of authority in religion. As if he had some authority in arithmetic. He has no standing in arithmetic; there is no standing in arithmetic but the standing of assumption or consent of minds. Arithmetic is sometimes simply a document as between parties, saying, Let it be understood that this figure and that figure added together mean another or third figure. But it has to be assumed; there is no revelation upon arithmetic, the multiplication table has nothing behind it but a human consent, and the days or months have to live the beggarly life of being permitted to live. And yet those of us who are on the Christian side of things are called upon to prove all we say in a certain way, or it will be discredited, and people will arm themselves against it under the name of unbelief or infidelity. O thou fool! everything has in it its own proof, or there is no proof.

Now we can stop at many points and illustrate this. What do you suppose is the probable age of this pebble which I have just picked out of the brook? I ask you, geologist, and the geologist replies as if he knew all about it: I think you must at least take it for granted that this pebble has been in existence two million years. What is your authority for saying so? The reply is, The general authority is the result of our investigation into the duration of the scheme of things which goes by the vague name of nature; we take into account rocks, formations, laminations, strata, and other long names that you probably as a tyro have never heard of. And I reply that having heard of them at this very moment I simply wonder what they are. Nature is old, we feel that too true; but Nature never gives us her real calendar. We have almost in our most insinuating and persuasive way invited dear old mother Nature to put her name in our little birthday book, with the suggestion that she might add the year in which she was born. But she never does that. She writes Nature in a bold Roman hand, and when we look for the date we want she is as mysterious as she can be. Yet we trust the age of nature; we argue from it, we say, Let it be granted that this occurred under such and such circumstances, and under such and such accumulations of periods of duration. But that is imagination, hypothesis, conjecture; the proof of which, if any proof there is, will be found a long way off. Yet all we can do in many cases is to argue upon assumption. That is how you brought up your little child. You assumed that the little creature was sane. What an act of faith! But you never regarded it as such. The other thing had to be proved; not the sanity, but the non-sanity had to be proved. That is how we ought to approach all great subjects, — to assume the great, the noble, the true, the profound, the beneficent, and if there be anything on the other side let it come out slowly, and let it be received with hostility, with angry unbelief; the mother says, I will not believe that my babe is insane. What is it that tempts us always to begin on the negative side, and to say, There is no God, There is no Bible, There is no inspired record,—we who would not for the world at first believe in the deficiency, mental or bodily, of our own little child? Change the centre of gravity, change

the mental and moral standpoint, and though we have written it down in words that a negative cannot be proved, yet let it be one of those negatives that we insist upon being proved before we treat the little suckling child as the beginning of a babbling idiot. Better prove the other way; if at last you have to give in, crying, oh the sorrow of it, and the bitter misery! let it be wrung from you by evidence which you cannot deny.

From the beginning God has been endeavouring to incarnate Himself in various proofs and authorities suitable to the growing mind of man. So He has made all nature a parable, a panorama, an open secret; upon every door of nature He has written, Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Then came a book, The Book, the Bible or Revelation. For God's sake and your sake, give it a fair chance! Let it prove its irreligiousness or its insanity, but remember that it is a book that wants to do you good; therefore it may have come from a good source. If it were a book of dreams and imaginings only you might receive it as such, but it is a book of discipline, a book of army orders; no soldier is to invent his own book; whatever the book may be, it tries to do us good, to dry our tears, to direct our way, to sustain us in our misfortune and distress; yea, it holds a lamp above the grave and frightens death into deeper gloom. Let it therefore have a fair chance. After the book comes Manhood, which is, so to say, the result of the book. The book has been sown as seed in our minds and hearts, and after it has come to fruition we have manhood. So the incarnation advances from nature to intellect, to character. It is a progressive revelation; it proves itself by itself. Revelation which is true never goes backward, it always has some larger kingdom, it always preaches a warmer, a larger welcome to the growing mind and the enlarging heart. These are the proofs. Let it be assumed that the Bible is the book of God and spoken by God, full of God, leading to God; let that assumption be nothing but an x to work with, but let us try how that assumption works out; then we must believe, commit ourselves to certain propositions and doctrines, receive a certain testimony and witness into our hearts; then we must indicate a certain discipline

of humiliation, depletion, bereavement, mockery, disappointment; the whole time hearing a voice saying, Hold on, be faithful unto death; do not let go; keep the commandments, follow the Christ, though it cost thee right hand and right eye; persevere. Then see what the upshot is; what are the sheaves we have brought, what the tokens, the signs, the proofs or the disproofs of our spiritual education; and I now say in view of human history and Christian experience that the result of that assumption, faithfully believed and faithfully carried out, is manhood, virility, and masculine nobleness. We began with an assumption, we proceeded to a conviction, we ended with a new manhood.

How profitable it would be if instead of going to the library to borrow a very large book to prove that Christ is the Son of God, and that Christianity is the sum of all virtue and spiritual excellence, we would simply go down where the work has been realised and brought into eloquent and impressive life. We do not need the book to prove the argument; the argument proves itself. If I were called upon to prove the truth of Christianity, I would lock up the library, and say to those who longed for elucidation or confirmation, Come with me, and I will show you some folks who ten years ago were little better than cannibals, men and women who had outlived their humanity, who had succeeded in obliterating the image of God from their very faces. Such and such agencies were brought to bear upon them, such and such gentle ministries operated upon their life; little by little the light broke, questions were asked, experiences were realised, services were offered; and one day all these folks seemed to see each other with new eyes; women had a new value, children became unspeakably precious, a sense of responsibility arose in the hearts in question; people began to ask how they could help one another to carry a burden, to bear a grievance, to sustain a sorrow, to make up for bereavement; little by little the sun came into the place from which he had been banished, little by little the woman gave glints and gleams of some hidden angel that was awakening in her womanly heart, and they are there to-day. And you ask, By what authority? The people themselves are the best

answer. And having shown you this proof I turn upon you, and if with fierceness and abruptness, it is because of my glowing gratitude to the God that redeemed these souls, and I ask, Where are *your* proofs? what has your non-religion done for the world? what has your unfaith done for little children, suffering women, toiling men, broken hearts? I challenge you.

This is how the line of proof developes itself; probably altogether an assumption at first; something that was to be taken for granted, something about which we said, Now, this is only an assumption, what is called a conjecture or an hypothesis; we say nothing about it at this stage of the inquiry, but let it be granted, and then what comes out of it, and necessarily comes out of it, and partakes of its own quality? What is it? Man! I have seen no other religion produce anything like this; other theories I may have intellectually accepted on approbation for purposes of speculative inquiry and titillation, but I have seen this Christianity do such things, and do such things by the very necessity of its own nature; I have seen this decalogue work such and such results, and these beatitudes realise themselves in such and such forms of heroism and martyrdom, patience and beneficence, that I have living, breathing, imperishable proofs and authorities.

That is my stand as a Christian minister and as a Christian thinker. I am quite prepared to displace the Bible, but not until you have put a better in its place; I think that is fair. I am prepared to pray at another altar, but not until you have given me reason to do so larger than at this moment I can believe. To show that we do not hold the Bible as a fetish, we say we are ready to give it up to-day if you will replace it by a better. I am no fetish-worshipper. I do not care for the pulpit as a mere platform or rostrum; but you must show me an instrument or medium by which I can do better work or better serve my day and generation, and to-morrow you will find my pulpit vacant. The Christian position is absolutely unassailable. Ignorant men may have ignorantly defended it, but if you will consult those who have lived the Bible

and companied with the Lord Jesus, and have seen morning, noon, and night His hands and His side, they will tell you what Jesus Himself tells us; standing up in His meek majesty and majestic meekness, He said, "Believe me for the works' sake." Could man, rational man, desire a better proof? When I go astray into a far land, and think I can invent a new religion or can elect a morality better than the morality of my mothers' Bible, I do not go to hear a very learned lecture by a very dim-minded man who can hardly make out his own manuscript. I go where my wife went, to some simple-minded, kindly, gracious fisher-folks on the north-east coast, men who have been, as they are not afraid or ashamed to say, converted, and I listen to their singing, and to their ungrammatical English, and to the outpouring of their spiritual experience; and I say, I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son. By what authority? By the authority of these men and women, by the authority of their homes, by the authority of their lives. Whatever made these men and women what I know them to be is the religion which I voluntarily and spontaneously and rapturously receive and believe, to live with, to die with. Young soul, when asked for authority, go to living instances, and stand by them. Whoever made the blind man see I will receive with gratitude, with adoration; and though at first I may be timid, yet in my timidity I will whisper, My Lord, my God! Then in ten years I will say the same words, but more loudly, and then at calm, expectant seventy I will say them with all the thunder of my gathered energy, My Lord and my God!

PRAYERS.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee for the providence of time. Thou dost preside over the moments and over the ages, Thou dost sit upon the circle of eternity, and nothing happens without Thy wise and loving will. It is a comfort to know that the very hairs of our heads are all numbered, that none of our steps will slide if so be we take hold of Thy hand and accept the guidance of Thine eye. The Lord is our strength and our salvation, our infinite sufficiency, and our immortal hope. Hitherto the Lord has led us, upheld us with the arm of His might, and comforted us with the solaces of His love. Thou wilt not forget the past, Thou wilt make all Thy promise sure to those who put their faith in Christ and live according to Thy will. It is our joy to know that everything about us is known in heaven; we can hide nothing from the searching eyes of Thy judgment or the pitying look of Thy love. It is enough, it is balmy as a summer morning, it is tender doctrine, divine supervision, and continual watchfulness. May we live and move and have our being in God, may we take nothing into our own hands, may we fall into the loving arms of the mighty God of Jacob; then shall we be assured and very steadfast, yea, as one of the rocks which Thou Thyself hast set in the earth, we shall be no more afraid, nor shall the spirit of depression overwhelm us. Surely then, living in God through Jesus Christ our Lord, we shall say, All is well, when the whole sky is a dark cloud. So let it be, Thou Father of spirits and Redeemer of the souls of men. Amen.

O THOU God of nations, we commend ourselves again to Thy notice and Thy love as members of this great suffering empire. We remember those who are far from home, who are struggling in what they believe to be a righteous and noble cause; we think of widows and orphans and parents bereaved, and with tender hearts we desire for them such consolation and support as they so deeply need. Wherein we have nationally done wrong may we confess the same and openly implore the mercy of God; wherein we are right and have a cause which Thou canst approve, Thou wilt prosper us in our endeavours to establish righteousness and justice in the earth. Have pity upon all men. The men who are slaying one another are Thy creatures; Thou didst make them all. Send the spirit of wisdom and equity, forbearance, and true philanthropy into all classes and sections engaged in this great sanguinary conflict. The Lord bring all war to a speedy and honourable issue, and hasten the time when all instruments of war shall become instruments of

husbandry. The Lord be with the Queen of this empire in her anxiety and solicitude and motherly bewilderment and sorrow of heart. As for those who rule us and lead us, may they be serious men, men of conviction, of depth and reality of character, and may their one anxiety be, not self-regard or self-consideration, but the unity and the happiness of all the people whom they represent. We offer this our humble and penitential prayer at the foot of the Cross and in the name of its august sufferer. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our heavenly Father, the fellowship and comfort of the Holy Ghost, abide with us until we see the open vision of heaven's morning. Amen.

LXVII.

THE PROVIDENCE OF TIME.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 15TH, 1900.

"*When the time was come.*"—LUKE ix 51.

F we look carefully into things, we shall find that every matter is related to a plan, a method or scheme of life. Time has hitherto been treated in the sacred record almost with contempt; it is spoken of as so transient, so empty, and our very life as measured by time is as a post hastening on his way, is as a vapour rising up to be blown away by the wind. What is our life as measured by time? A breath, a gasp, nothingness. Yet here we have time elevated into a kind of significance and special importance. "When the time was come": cannot man hasten the time? That man can never do. Cannot man hasten the coming of the summer? Not by one hairsbreadth. Is it not in the power of man to say to the snow, Be melted and flow away in fertilising rivers among the valleys and the meads and the fair gardens? The snow does not know the name of man. The Lord keeps all the great opportunities and appointments in His own hand, and He will not allow the most scientific and painstaking of us to interfere for one moment in the degree in which His providences shall ripen and take effect. We are no doubt, when we measure ourselves, great men, and we are gradually, with a fine and most appropriate dignity,

getting more and more control over the laws of nature. Yet a snowfall delays the express, and, in effect, looking at it poetically, says, You shall not go to-day. We are the men who are making such great strides and noble and sure advances in the paths of science; yet the rain will wet through our most scientific man, and bring on pneumonia. It is so comical, and yet it is so sad, that man persuades himself that he is getting higher up the ladder in this matter of acquiring a wider knowledge of the laws of nature. It is exactly the same with the laws of time. We can light a conservatory fire and hasten the ripening of sundry flowers and fruits, but we can light no fire that takes effect upon a landscape and turns a wilderness into a garden of roses. If we could but know our limitations and quietly work within them, we should live in a holy and quiet sanctuary, we should not attempt to hasten anything; we should remember a great and most profound text, "He that believeth shall not make haste": he will leave the clock in the hands of God, he will permit the sovereign One to fix the moment of maturity and the fruition of holy prophecy. Yet man is most impatient. Where he can, as he vulgarly says, hurry up anything, he does not spare the lash: what a mercy of mercies it is that he cannot hurry up the sun, or the spring, or the summer! Why, he would lash himself to death! How great, how tender the mercy that keeps man in a certain little place, and smiles with a fine contempt upon his endeavours to get more and more control over the laws of nature. There is a great moral lesson here, which we shall discover if we study the providence of moments.

This or that action, says the divine Ruler, shall be done at such and such a time; it shall not be done one hour before the appointed moment; all the kings in the world cannot hasten the chariot-wheels one hairsbreadth; we simply have to stand still and see the divine movement and watch the palpitations that make the very clouds of mystery alive as if a heart were throbbing within their folds. Jesus Christ was very careful in pointing out this matter of providential time, and so was the apostle Paul. Jesus Christ said, "Woman, what have I to

do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come": it may come at any moment, but that moment itself has not yet arrived; we must not forestall or anticipate. Who but some subtle imp ever suggested the notion of mortgage in any form but especially the idea of mortgaging time? Who can borrow from the day that is yet to come? Who has any right to pledge unborn time? It may never come, or he who pledges it may never see it come. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Thus Jesus Christ says again and again, if not in so many words, yet in substantial and spiritual effect, "Not yet"—"Mine hour is not yet come"; "Father, the hour is come." He watched it descend like a falling jewel from the bright heavens. It was an hour of sorrow, but it came from the place of joy; it was an hour born in heaven, and let down with its tragic Cross to the waiting and trembling earth. This is the point, that the time is fixed: "Is there not an appointed time for man upon the earth?" His rude violence would become a sin, if he would plunge himself into eternity; he must carry his murder with him and answer for it yonder. If we would live and move and have our being in God, we must wait for the hour for closing the weary eyes and stepping into the newly arrived chariot from heavenly places. We would hasten the coming of that chariot if we could, but our discipline lies in the fact that we must not even wish to hasten it. That is where the Cross with all its misery of agony, and yet its latent mystery of hope, enters into our poor life. It is so arranged by the eternal One, that I must not wish my black deliverer to come, though I perspire blood and though I cannot straighten my back to receive again the blazing of the sun upon my face. Yet there is a voice—oh that wondrous mystery of voices! —which says, Son, thou mayest not even wish for the ending of thy pain. Nor must we wish for the moment of our coronation. Jesus Christ was ready to show the world all His miracles; He was prepared from eternity with all the wonders which were to accompany the Messianic reign. Yet Jesus Christ waited for the moment, Jesus Christ tarried for the divine will; Jesus Christ said, Mine hour is not yet

come, I am watching, I am waiting, I am neither wishing nor praying, I am simply awaiting the ripening of time, the almost visible presence of the one moment that is critical and agonistic. We are too small to live as Jesus did; we can only hope and pray to live in the direction of His life, to show what we would be if we could but for this sense of death that outruns the summer and this sense of incompleteness that mocks our most aspiring ambition.

Something is to be learned from the almost taunt with which Jesus Christ replied to the scribes and Pharisees upon one occasion; said He, "Your hour is always ready." That is the distinction between philosophy, and impatience or ignorance. Your hour is always available; it came from nowhere, and it is not going anywhere in particular; it is something that comes and goes bubble-like, but how it rose, how it burst, and how it was forgotten are matters of no concern to the sorrowing heart of the world. You have no forethought, no afterthought, no sense of the relation, fitness, and spiritual music of things; so you can at any moment do what you want to do, only the thing you want to do is not worth doing, because it goes not back into the eternal or forward into the everlasting. We know what the meaning of such personal hastiness and impetuosity is. There are people who always want us to be doing or going on. To that poor ridiculous game has the worst species of irreligiousness, namely, the pietic species, brought the civilisation and the religion of the world! There are persons who are never happy except in a noise; there are souls that think nothing is going on unless they themselves are the chief part of the noise. They do not understand the mystery of silence; they enjoy a conversation in the degree in which they take a leading part in it. They declare afterwards that the meeting was most interesting and most profitable; when they did not speak, the meeting was not worth attending, and the whole outlook of civilisation hungry and poor. We have not learned what it is to have a little sanctuary into which we enter and hear only that which cannot be heard, and are delighted and thrilled by the wordless music. That kind of realisation belongs to the higher life; it may take us seven

years and more to enter into that high tabernacle of God; when we enter it we shall know that silence may be the purest music, and that rest is the last expression of energy.

The apostle Paul also made observations upon this matter of moments of time. Said he, in 1 Corinthians iv. 5, "Judge nothing before the time." If we could be kept to that rule what generous judgments we would often pronounce! We should be no longer censorious, vengeful, resentful; we should wait for the signal from heaven. When all is known much will be forgiven. You cannot even in your confession tell your priest everything. Even when you think you have emptied your memory of its last recollection you have not begun the real story. You are not understood because you cannot explain yourself; if you are charged with this or that sin or offence, it may be broad black crime, you cannot always tell exactly and exhaustively how it came to be; you would have to go over the centuries and dig up your grandsires and call them as living witnesses to say what lives they lived. There is a descent of poison, there is an old, old acridness traceable two centuries since or ten centuries ago. Only God knows how your blood came to be so compounded; only the Eternal knows this blending of juices and acids and this quickening of poisonous and pestilent desires; leave the judgment in the hands of God. "Judge nothing before the time." When He who broods over the earth knows all about us, which He does from the beginning, I wonder not that He says, "The first shall be last, and the last shall be first," for the kingdom is not divided and there is but one King. Beware of ill-timed judgments; beware of hasty speeches upon other men's conduct; beware of that foul Pharisee who thanks God that he is not as this publican. When the two histories are searched into and lifted up into the light, what if the publican have the crown and the Pharisee be not in the broad heaven at all? Therefore judge nothing before the time. Wait another moment; by the next post we may get the explanation; in a moment more the light may flash. Great things are done in great moments. "Let there be light," and there was light; no

chronometer could measure the distance between the fiat *Lux !* and the shining glory. Judge nothing before the time. Never pretend that you know more than you do know ; never give people the impression that you could say a great many things if you were not so religiously reticent and so piously and exorbitantly as it were silent and forbearing about matters ; do not give the impression that some other man owes his life to you because you could tell this and that. If you say so I would, with the open Bible before me, and the roof of God's house over me, pronounce you coward.

Do we not sometimes admit the principle of providential moments even in our own speeches and actions? We say, "There is a tide in the affairs of man which taken at the flood leads on to fortune." Why not take the tide an hour earlier? Because there is a law of tides. Why not wait until we can approach the tide in leisurely and impressive dignity? Because there is a law of tides ; the law of tides imposes upon us the duty of taking it at the flood. We atheistically speak of the lucky moment, or even the psychological moment ; whatever we say in description of the moment, it is better for us to recognise the great religious fact that there is a moment when a thing is in season, another when it is out of season ; there are opportune moments, and moments inopportune, and upon this basis of critical speciality is the providence of God conducted. Oh, if I could rest upon that great truth I should be a man again with sevenfold strength, and with most precious, yea, with unquenchable hope, but the tempter says, Try it now! and his now is not God's now ; so my foot slips, and I fall from the pinnacle and am dashed almost to pieces on the rocks below. Of course you and I would like this or that to happen to-day ; we say in our ignorance and impatience, Why does it not happen at this very moment, or in an hour or two? If we had the ordering of things we should arrange that this matter should mature and fructify by sunset, or we should identify it with the more poetic time of sunrise ; why is it not according to our will? Because we are not God. We must be taught in some way, probably by lash and scourge and disappointment and

contempt, that there is only one God, and that His will is sovereign, is supreme.

It is curious and affecting to see how men try to make time. Often we attempt to create opportunities and to fix the responsibility of their occurrence upon God. "When a convenient day was come," we read in the history of the king. "A convenient day"—a day when things came together, and because we wanted them to come together we thought they came providentially; the atmosphere was, so to say, propitious; the appointment lay in this or that direction, and it really seemed as if we could see the very hand of God in it. Oh the foulness of the human heart! oh the wickedness of the human soul! We want a thing to be done, and we make the doing of it convenient,—all the radiating lines coming back into the centre, and seeming to say in their consolidation that this is the hour which God appoints. Do not interfere with God, do not endeavour to be under-deities, small minor gods; leave all in the hands of Him who is Father, Redeemer, and Spirit of all light and holiness. "When a convenient day was come" Herod arranged that this and that should be done; we make our own conveniences and charge them upon God; we arrange our little plans, and then say that we never had anything to do with them.

It is almost impossible for some men to keep from palpable lying. They seek for appointments, they move heaven and earth to get the appointment, and when they succeed in getting the appointment they solemnly declare that it was most providential, and came upon them with perfect surprise. How hard not to lie! We make certain arrangements for meeting certain persons that we may prosecute certain purposes upon which we have set our hearts, and then we say, How providential! that we should meet at this hour and at this place does really seem as if this thing were from heaven. It was all arranged; by prompting, by suggestion, by letters, by divers subtle and inexplicable missions and methods everything was so arranged as to culminate in this meeting; and then we say, What a surprise! and what a providence! Oh, it is so hard not to lie!

Said another man, "When a convenient time is come —when I have a more convenient season—I will call upon thee"; resolving in his heart that no such season should ever occur. When I have a more convenient season I shall be glad to see thee; thou hast put my soul through the fires of hell; thou hast tortured me; I must get rid of this man; I cannot rudely say I will never see him again, I know what I will do, I will say, When I have a more convenient season I will send for thee; and thus may give the impression that I was delighted with his discourse. He reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, and he spoke with great force, and I wished him to receive the impression that my wife and myself were very much impressed and greatly pleased by his wonderful discourse —the Lord send him out of my way for ever! Men can make it convenient to go to church, or they can make it extremely inconvenient to go and hear the word of the Lord. There are times, of course, when circumstances do seem to combine against the most honest desire, but there are other occasions when we can so arrange matters as to make our convenience the standard of the divine purpose. Let every man examine himself, let no man judge another. Saith one man, I must so arrange matters that I can do this or that on Sunday; on no account would I take an hour of my own time, but probably I shall not be missed if I do not go to the assembly of the people of God; I will cut an hour out of the consecrated time, and then say that it was most convenient, or to go would have been most inconvenient. Oh depart, and let thy children not know thee, because thou art a leper white as snow! It is a terrible thing to live under the criticism of God; it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; we should pray for an honest heart and an honest speech, and pray to be delivered from the tyranny of subconscious lies: that is to say, lies which are so deep down in our hearts that we almost persuade ourselves that we are true men and not false.

What then are we to do? The answer is that if we are in Christ Jesus, without whose precious blood we can have no communion of the heart with the living God, we have simply to accept the discipline of waiting. We must learn to do without some things; we must

be taught, though the lesson be most painful and severe, that we may look at some things without touching them. We are trained by a great vision of possibilities, yet the Lord does not permit us to carry out the possibilities into effect. Think what it must be to the soul to see the things that might have taken place, the persons towards whom we might have stood in another and happier relation! Within such souls or within such environment are we trained to self-abnegation, to self-crucifixion. Why may not this be done? Because it is not the will of God. How easy it would be for such and such complications to take place, issuing in such and such felicitous results; why may not the combination be effected? Because it is not the will of God. When I want to give up my pastorate and seek for something more congruous with the spirit of my ambition or even my more or less innocent hope, why should I not just force the door, and then vanish as if I had not been near it? Ought not a man to use the means in order to secure the end? Not until he has obtained God's permission. Such and such a place is open: why may I not look after it, and get half a dozen friends to write to the place about me, saying how admirably adapted I am to that very position? and then for me at a congratulatory meeting to assure the people that I had no idea whatever of any such thing coming to pass. This may be the same in statesmanship, in the craft of politics, in commerce, in all the departments of life. I may want to be member of Parliament for such and such a borough, and get certain people to write to me and to write to the borough, and if I should happen to be elected I could go down to the borough and say that the very idea of being entrusted with the representation of such a constituency simply never occurred to me. O the danger! the temptation! the pits that lie hidden on life's rugged road! The Lord's Spirit go with us, and point out the death-traps, and save us from this awful ruin. I will trust in Christ, I will say to my Saviour, Still lead on; through desert or through gardenland, still lead on; through deep waters, through rocky places, still lead on; through flowery gardens, through balmy air, across velvet sward, still lead on; and let me do nothing before the time.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou dost work in the great field, and the tares may be Thine as well as the wheat; we cannot tell: who can follow all the way of the Lord, and say, Behold, this is the doing of heaven, and this the doing of the pit? Can there be evil in the city, and the Lord not have done it? Is Thine a limited sovereignty? or dost Thou include the devil and all his angels? Have we lost our hold upon God? and art Thou punishing us by divers illusions and schisms and heterodoxies which we trace to men, not knowing that the Lord may be the author of delusions? It is all so strange, so weird, so vexing to the heart. Thou dost give us up sometimes to the working of our imagination, Thou dost abandon us to the idolatry of our own will; we do things we did not at first mean to do, and then we trace them to the enemy. Behold us, O Lord, and bring us back to simplicity and sincerity and young-heartedness, and deliver us from the delusion and the lie of the day. Behold us, we humbly pray Thee, as we tarry at the Cross; we want to be good and wise and right, and we do not want to overload the devil with responsibility. The Lord send us a searching into our own hearts with one of the Lord's own candles. Amen.

LXVIII.

THE GENESIS OF DELUSIONS.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 22ND, 1900.

"*I also will choose their delusions.*"—ISAIAH lxvi. 4.

HEY will think it is the devil, but I am behind it all; they will ascribe it to some peculiar condition of the brain, and they will endeavour to trace that condition to indigestion, to the wrong food, to a mistake in choices and fancies; they will never suspect that I am in it. We are not worshippers of a limited Sovereign; the universe is not split up into sections, God presiding over, it may be, the larger section, and the devil presiding over the remaining fraction. Yet it would seem as if this was the religion of some people; what wonder if they are disturbed and perturbed and dealt with vexatiously, the whole process ending in confusion twice confounded? They do not know the central reality of things; they have no faith; they have a kind of meagre and struggling sentiment, but a deep, living, eternal faith they have not; and they cannot have until they get back to the centre and metaphysic of things. It is no use preachers coddling up people who ought to be stripped and sent into the open air when the barometer is very low. But we cannot get to these great heights all at once. It will be our delight, in the hope that it may be our profit, to show that delusions are sometimes falsely estimated and falsely treated. Once we should have been shocked to have heard even in the most secret whisper that God had anything to do with men's delusions; are we any hardier now? have we a stronger grip of things? I was once so severely handled by a man who saw in a prayer which was

offered in this place the words, "Disgrace not the throne of Thy glory." He wrote to the journals about it, he almost, according to his own estimate of things, overwhelmed me; he was irate beyond all the heat known to the thermometer; he could not control himself; he gave away the accusing pamphlet at this front door. I do not wonder if he died a bankrupt if he threw his money away in that sort of fashion. What, said he, shall it be permitted that a man shall stand in a Christian pulpit, and say, "Disgrace not the throne of Thy glory"? I had no answer but one; I simply said, You must fight it out with Jeremiah, and not me; I was simply quoting the prophet. The man thought I was inventing something out of my own mind, and he charged me with blasphemy. What a mercy it is that there are not many such fools! Be very careful how you contradict certain men; they may have a rod up their sleeve or a dagger; let some other body contradict them first, and you see how it goes on. And so when we hear that God will choose their delusions, how shocked we are, and how pained, and how distressed! Yet here is the text in Isaiah lxvi. 4, "I will choose their delusions"; they shall be idiots of My own making, stumblers and gropers for whose existence I am responsible.

The apostle uses the word which we have correctly translated delusion:—"For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. ii. 11). The apostle Paul was not so dainty and whimsically sensitive as we are; his God ruled the heavens and the earth, little time and great eternity. And he said that the object of this delusion was that "They all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." We should carefully consider the exact terms used by the indignant and ever-majestic apostle. God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe not *a* lie, as it is written in this English, but that they should believe *the* lie—the lie of the day, the popular lie. Every day has its own lie; it may be war, or gambling, or atheistic prosperity, or materialism; and people rush to the lie of the hour as if it were a revelation and should

be accepted as such without further inquiry. Notice how true it is that every day has its heresy, its lie, its devil. Why do we deprive ourselves of spiritual blessing and profit by imagining that all the things that are written in the Bible were limited to the time in which the Bible was written? Why do we not realise that the Bible is published every morning in anticipation of every newspaper, and that it travels not on wheels of iron to distant and out-of-the-way places, but travels with the light, ay, and is there before the light has well begun its quick journey? Persons sometimes imagine that they have no time to read the Bible early in the day, because they are so anxious to get through the newspaper before they get to business; not knowing that the Bible is the original newspaper and has all the news of the day in it.

"I also will choose their delusions"—their devices, their imaginings, their new brain conditions and brain expressions; I will take the whole case into My own hands, and even that will not drive the whole of them to see that there is a God. I will trouble their dreams. Dreamland is part of the acreage of the universe, and all the universe is God's; I will send cruel and punitive nightmare upon these people; they have abandoned Mine altar, they have taken to their own ways, and I will trouble all their dreams and all their fancies, and they will think that they have created the whole intellectual creation thus established amongst them out of their own wit; they will publish poems in their own names, they will write and dictate and sell nightmares, and call them original productions. Has God any amusement in the heavens? can God smile? He gave man a facial muscle that has nothing to do but to smile, and was not man made in the image and likeness of God? We cannot understand these things nor properly define and limit them; and yet we sometimes in our most exalted moods wonder about certain things and suggest poor but tentative answers. A dream may be a delusion. You may rely upon dreams as you have done for many centuries; there are interpreters of dreams; we say that a dream after midnight means one thing, and that a dream ought to be laid upside down, and that we are per-

fectly sure that there is something in the dream because it was so startlingly vivid—so startlingly vivid that when we were consciously awake we looked around to see if all the *dramatis personæ* were not standing round the bed. We trace these dreams to our late meals or to our undigested food, or to some memorial of the trouble which passed over our outer life during the common day. Does it never, never occur to us that God is the author of dreams, that God has worked wondrous things through the dream miracle, that God has associated Himself in history with the springs which He caused to fly in the darkness and unrest of the night? God may be the author of heterodoxy; God may have His own reasons for punishing some men by giving them over to a strong delusion, so that they oftentimes, being very young, inexperienced, and living at other persons' expense, may contradict all the old divines and flick their fingers in the face of the whole Church. It may be in some deep interior sense that God is in it; the persons who are afflicted with this heresy will not always see it to be the case. Sometimes men take a little pleasure in being thought to be heretical, because it is so fresh, so intellectually fresh, so damp with originality, so dewy with impossibleness. There are some persons who know just where orthodoxy begins and heterodoxy begins; they are exceedingly penetrating persons who have taken out a blank licence and signed it themselves, and are operating upon it as if it were a charter granted by the chancery of heaven. Why do we not sometimes pensively and broken-heartedly wonder if some of our fancies and conceptions and theories of things may not be delusions sent upon us by the punitive ministry of the living Father, that through the wilderness of delusion we may be scourged by hunger and thirst in the direction of the home city where the Father waits surrounded by a plenteousness of bread? Many persons are great at expelling other people from the Church. There are people who can expel a soul from the visible Church of Christ, and go home and make a good supper. Oh the broken-heartedness of it and the unutterable sorrow! After that expulsion we should be drowned for many an hour in the bitter waters of penitence.

Apply this to your own family; do not shrink from applying it to the eccentricities and arrancies of your own sons and daughters. Who knows what they may have done to have brought this state of mind upon themselves? and who can tell but that God is training them by these odd out-of-the-way courses that there is no place like home—the faith-home, the house of God, Bethel. God may sometimes allow a man to feed on the east wind in order to teach him that in the east wind there is no nutrition for his soul.

When does God choose for us our delusions, intellectual devices, and mean and false-tending imaginings and nightmares? Often when we have sinned away our privileges. We have attended church so long as to have become quite familiar with it, with a familiarity of that kind which breeds, if not contempt, at least indifference. A man may have sat through a ministry thirty years long, and have remained a hard heart at the last. A man may boast that he sat under the brilliant ministry of one teacher, and the instructive teaching of another expositor, and under the comforting ministry of one tender-hearted as Barnabas; and yet when we come to ask him concerning the result of it all we may find him under the spell of a delusion which keeps him out of the Church and makes him an alien and a stranger who ought to have been like a child at home. It is a dangerous thing to have too many spiritual privileges; such an abundance of opportunity of understanding somewhat of the kingdom of God may tell against us in the judgment. Every sermon ought to be to us as a spiritual miracle, every exposition of the divine word should be as a new sign and token in the morning heavens; every sweet hymn we sing should be another baptism of reviving dew. This must be so because the Bible itself is so. No man has read the Bible through. Of course there are some dear sweet souls who imagine that they have read the Bible through once a year for many years; in their own sense of the word that may be perfectly true, but it is a poor sense, an unworthy sense. There are some of us still struggling in the Pentateuch and still in the four gospels, and others who are still in the Epistle to the Romans, with very little hope of ever getting into the

wonderful land of the Apocalypse. It is the heart that reads; it is love that tarries at the feet.

When we have trusted our own imaginations God may have turned imagination itself, our finest faculty, into a delusion. When the imagination carries us too far God simply breathes upon us, and it becomes a delusion; He takes the poetry out of it, He robs day of the morning light, and that which might under some circumstances have been to us as wings, great strong pinions that flap themselves in the upper airs, yea, even at the gate of heaven, may be turned into a poor cripple, a mean dreamer, a man who is the victim of his own misguided impression. God often chooses our oracles for us or our delusions for us when we seek for guidance at forbidden oracles. There are many such oracles at human disposal. One man has his dice-box, and says, If I turn up such and such numbers I will know what to do. Another man says, If I can invent a system of casting lots I shall be able almost to outwit God Himself, and to know the divine mind before the mind has been consulted. I think I shall go to spirit-rapping and to table-turning, and to all the various sorceries and witcheries with which poor human history is crowded, and I will draw a lot or consult an oracle for myself; and God in His anger may say, Let it be so; and thus He may permit, He never enjoins, such courses, until the heart has proved its own moral idiocy and is led to cry out for the true Oracle, the living and the infinite wisdom.

God always sends us delusions when we undertake the management of our own lives. A man thinks that he will undertake everything on his own account and do it in his own strength, not knowing that he has no account and that he has no strength but such as may be given to him by a condescending and loving God. We are not self-complete; we belong to other lives, we are part of the great household. God will not send the sanction or the comfort of His benedictions upon persons who isolate themselves and who undertake to do all that requires to be done without the communion of saints and the masonry of regenerated hearts. We belong to one another. Your child may have the

wisdom to-day, the wife may have it on another occasion, you yourself may be the chosen instrument through whom God has sent His message for the day. Let there be no self-idolatry, no self-containment, and no self-limitation. We have come to the Church of the firstborn, to an innumerable company of angels, to the millionfold of the Cross and army of the spirits, and we must in all things ask God, just as little self-distrusting children would ask father or mother, what is to be done next. Never make any plans when you come into the distribution and direction of your higher life. "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow." Drop your plan-making: for what is your life? It is a vapour that cometh for a little time and then vanisheth away.

Then what are we to do? We are to go back to God, we are to live and move and have our being in God, we are to have a sanctuary in the rock, we are to possess the key of a chamber in high places into which we can retire prayerfully, lovingly, and penitentially, there to learn what God would have us do on this particular day and at that particular hour. Then we shall have no delusion; God will say, They are returning, they have found no bread in the wilderness, their misery is crying out for the living God, there are tears in their poor eyes; I will meet them, and hold out my heart to them, and wave them back to the only hospitality that can furnish and sustain the redeemed soul. We must have no double purpose in life. That is the mischief, and that indeed is the ruin of many a practice; we do not tell the truth; in other words, we do not love and live the truth. When Jesus Christ said in His sermon, Let your Yea be yea and your Nay nay, He preached a doctrine that would revolutionise society, and destroy all the haunts of hypocrisy and self-seeking.

Yet we may gabble over the words as if they meant nothing; on the contrary, they mean everything, even those simple words go into the heart of reality and pronounce judgments in the court of righteousness. I must have no double purpose in coming into the pulpit

or in opening the pulpit Bible, or God will even allow me to stray, and possibly He may order me astray that He may humiliate me and show that the nimbus which is round about my poor failing head is no crown, but a twisted twine. We must have no double purpose in speech; we must never say one thing and mean another; we must be sincere, flawless like porcelain even when the sun shines through it; we must be as the seamless chrysolite; we must impersonate the righteousness of God. Then we shall have no delusions, but a simple, beneficent, grand policy, which will end in great harvest fields here and eternal summer yonder.

And we shall escape delusions if we use our own experience of deliverances for the benefit of other people. He that converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall cover a multitude of sins, yea, shall save a soul from death. You will get your religion back again in proportion as you preach it. If you would have a living church at home you must go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature; afterwards you will return to your home-church, to fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, old pastors, and friends, and say, We have seen great things on the mission-field, we have because we gave, we lived the Gospel, loved it, preached it, and hastened from shore to shore to tell it to every listening soul, and therefore we have had more ourselves. Ah me, that a man should sit in this pew or in that, and know a good deal about the Gospel, and never mention it to another human creature! What would be said of a man if he, having a panacea for some bodily ill, heard of another person suffering from that ill, and never mentioned the panacea to the suffering creature? Cry shame upon him! he is a murderer.

PRAYER.

O THOU that hearest prayer, to Thee shall all flesh come. Thou hast spoken great words respecting all flesh, all men, all nations, all tribes. We do not understand the wholeness of Thy love; it shall be revealed to us little by little; meanwhile we talk of our nation and our people: not knowing that the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, and Thine the fulness of the sea. But Thou dost train us day by day and little by little, a lesson at a time, and a precept as we are able to bear it. We are young and small and often ignorant, and our wonder is, as the light increases within the temple of our mind, that Thou dost not hold us in derision. We are of yesterday and know nothing; we cannot see before us; to the blind there is no light, there is no summer glory. Yet Thou dost in Christ Jesus Thy Son, in whose name we pray and in whose name alone we find acceptance, teach us little by little that other people are Thine, that Thou dost carry the whole world, yea, and the whole universe, in Thy warm bosom, where it finds its summer and its rest and its growing power. If we confess our sins, Thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins. That is not enough for us, we cry for more; we would that all evil might be destroyed, that we might be cleansed from all unrighteousness; not only pardoned, but sanctified, entering into the larger temple and catching all the larger meanings of Thy love. Oh! that we might be delivered from the bondage of little things, from mean endeavours and paltry occupations, and be brought into the liberty of Christ Jesus our Lord, where we might see all things in their relation and in their unity. Teach us that we shall find everything in Thy holy Book; may we search the Scriptures that we may find the Christ, from the first page to the last; and whilst we are searching may Jesus Himself draw near, and begin at the beginning and go through the whole process, until our hearts glow like a conscious summer. Amen.

LXIX.

WORKING TOWARDS IDEALS.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 25TH, 1900.

"*For all nations.*"—MARK xi. 17.

"ALL nations," "of all nations." It was a great reading of the Scriptures; this was a thunder sermon. The butchers had not ears to hear it; they were a grim, gruesome mob, gruesome as their trade. Yet "of all nations" does not express the true accent, purpose, and the music of that wondrous discourse. "For all nations" would be better than "of all nations." The temple was built for all people that on earth do dwell. Perhaps the people who built it did not understand this in all the fulness of its meaning. A building is to many persons only four walls and a roof; they do not see the poetry or the ideality of the structure; consequently we have an abundance of houses, and only a home here and there. Homes are not made of bricks. We read in Mark xi. 17: "My house shall be called of all nations"; we should read, "My house shall be called for all nations"—the home of homes, the house built for everybody, my Father's house. Whoever found Christ's name associated with a little paltry patriotic idea? Jesus Christ was no patriot, Jesus Christ was a philanthropist; the Son of God was no politician, He was a statesman, He grasped the whole situation, and allotted to everyone east or west, north or south, what was proper to the occasion and the environment. Some people never see the ideal of things; they are afraid of what they call mysticism, idealism; they are poor self-starved literalists, and the Bible slips out of their hands because it was made by a mechanical process. The smallest little hut on the

barest hillside in which a hymn of the heart is sung is a great ideal. Persons who can only live under big roofs of course smile at it and point towards it with a walking staff, and pucker up their unintelligent faces as they leave the thing behind them. Jesus Christ goes after these people and scourges them, lacerates them, says, It is written, My house is a house for all nations, and the little house you have just passed with a sneer is a miniature sanctuary or temple or heaven. Some people never saw the sun in a dewdrop. Pity them! they are not all poets, else how could some of them follow the occupations which yield them no livelihood?

Jesus Christ looked over all the walls of the temple and the outside parts of the temple, the low walls that marked definitions of space and in a certain sense of consecration and proprietorship. These travelling cattle-dealers and poulterers had gathered within certain spaces that were supposed to be not consecrated; there they sold pigeons and lambs, animals for sacrifice; all sorts and conditions of social status were represented there, the rich Jew and the poor Jew, and some outsiders that could hardly be classified at all. The men who were poulterers and cattle-dealers fixed themselves within certain boundaries almost in the Jewish temple itself; they went as near to the temple proper as they possibly could. When Jesus Christ came and saw the scene His great young heart was sore as with a new wound. How had these men been talking? We may paraphrase their tavern speech in this way: Surely we can have our counters spread out here; there are people here who have divers standards and denominations of money; they will want the big money changed into little money, and we can sell these pigeons and fowls and lambs, and be quite a convenient medium of commerce between one set of persons and another; and we can do all that within these almost Gentile spaces, these outer courts, these annexes and appendages, and there can be no harm in our making a little market-place here. But when the Son of God came He recognised the temple in its unity, the temple in its ideality, in its high poetic spiritual

meaning, and, making a lash, He scourged these fellows from the purlieus of the holy place; for, said He, My Father's house is for all nations; every bit of it is sanctified, every stone has been purified in the fire of the divine acceptance; be off! go! and the thong made itself heard in the air. What a blessed and comforting thought that Jesus Christ saw the whole house, the whole idea, and that He foresaw a day when that idea would spread amongst all nations, and king and peasant of this land and of that shall be equally welcome and equally recognised as members of the Father's household. When did you ever find the Lord Christ associated with a little idea? You have your little dreams and you have also your little prejudices which you call your patriotisms, and you have your little bags of self-conceit which you call your consciences; you have and we all have our half notions and imperfect purviews, and we think that we could manage everything perfectly with a strong handling, with a penetrating perspicacity. We make an idol of a nation and think our idolatry is patriotism. Within a given line that may be well enough, but it must be recognised as belonging only to a definite boundary. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, and not a drop of the ocean but would reflect the glory of His image. We need to keep long company with the dear Christ to know the meaning of things.

Now in this instance Jesus Christ accuses the intruders, and those who permitted the intrusion, of narrow-minded ideas, and He accuses them of being imperfect and misleading interpreters of the divine revelation and purpose. To have Jesus Christ read the Bible with us; that would be educational, spiritual instruction, divine inspiration. He would take us into the roots of things, He would get behind the north wind of words and fill us with the spirit of wisdom and of grace. It is a comforting thing if some dear old preacher will begin the Bible with us, meekly saying as becomes the dignity of a great soul, I will tell you as far as I am able to do so what God has taught me about His own book. What a delight it would have been to me as a young, struggling, groping preacher if some sweet-souled Samuel or

even Elijah had said to me, Before you go out to deliver the message, let us read it together; I being the older man can tell you what I know about this message, but we must not rely upon any man's word; every morning we must meet before the dew is off the grass, and the first thing we do is to pray; I will pray sometimes, and then you will pray at other times, and we will read the holy message together; and when the Spirit has interpreted the message to our poor waiting hearts we will go out, the old man and the young man, and tell others what we have seen and heard and known, felt and handled of the Word of life, and great shall be the harvest-time. Will not our venerable ministers and scholars and practised suppliants take others by the hand and say, Let us read the message together; God wrote it; we have not to invent a gospel, but to preach one, and we have not to hear what other men think about the gospel, we are to study the gospel itself, and to receive auxiliary comment and hint within its own proper lines, and be grateful for it as the best which such expositors could give us. Let us live inside the sanctuary; do not let us have two things to do in life; let us be men of one purpose, one consecration, one sacrifice of blood. Jesus Christ alone can interpret the Cross; Jesus Christ interprets the Scriptures by interpreting the context. The context is the greater text. The context is the text without which the limited text can never be understood. Every leaf traces the milk of its sustenance to the root; not only does the great branch do this, but the tiniest little twig that trembles in the breeze would seem sometimes almost to be peeping over the big branches and to be looking down to the root, and then to be saying, I am still here, think of me, I belong to you; without your hidden, vital root, I could not tremble in the breeze, I could only die and be blown away by the wind. Ay, amen, so be it, thou little trembling leaf, thou toy and pet of the zephyr, thou art part and parcel of the biggest oak that grows in Bashan. Jesus Christ in interpreting the Scriptures would take away from us many of our favourite little texts. There are some persons so fearfully and wonderfully made that they have constructed denominations upon half a sentence.

Such people are not above reason or below reason, they are simply outside reason, and I have no time to tarry with them in their progress to oblivion. To hear the true interpreter read the Scriptures! When Jesus Christ wanted to explain an event that occurred say the day before yesterday, what do you think He did? He began at Moses. What preaching was this! That preaching would not be tolerated now. The great Biblical preachers are on the shelves of our libraries. Many persons in a great haste to get nowhere tell us that the minister must have preached at least three-quarters of an hour. What a mercy they were not on the way to Emmaus, for then the Preacher spoke the whole eight miles, and the people were not tired when He was done; their hearts were aflame with love, and they said in their souls, Who is this? He carries the whole heavens in the brightness of His eyes and in the balminess of His breath.

And Jesus Christ, in the next place, included the whole human race in the temple idea. God never commanded any temples to be built for twos and threes, and to end their purpose in these trivial numbers. When He saved the twos and threes it was that He might save the world through them. Sometimes the number was very small, but it was a vital number; there was enough saved, sometimes called the remnant, out of which to get the biggest forests that ever waved on the hillsides of the world. He said He would save a city, He would save a remnant, He would save one little child, He would save eight persons, He would save an Isaac; He would do a wonder of this kind, but always having before His eyes the world, the whole world, all nations, every creature. That is the divine love, and it is useless our endeavouring to whittle it away by verbal criticism and by some monstrous display of our ignorance or our selfishness. Whenever God did a little thing it was the beginning of a great thing; and we have sometimes attempted to stop the process and to begin the interpretation before the text has been announced. You find it in the first chapter of Genesis. Oh, when shall this old heart of mine get though that first chapter? Never. And so few people read it. The great Creator said

that this or that had the seed in itself. What a revelation! what a new book! Here is the ear of corn. No. But I have it in the hollow of my hand. You have not, in the little narrow verbal sense which you are tempted to attach to that fact. He who has an ear of corn in the hollow of his hand has the harvest of the world; he who has an acorn has Bashan; he who has the cedar's seed has Lebanon; he who has a place in which to pray has a place that will expand until it takes in all nations. What then becomes of any little notion along the religious and especially along the Christian line? All Christians should be great men, all Christians should have great minds because they have great subjects, and the subject and the mind are related to one another in a sense congenital, and therefore when fair play is done to the subject the mind will grow, and when the subject is fairly treated the subject will grow, and by-and-bye there will be a new map without frontiers, a globe beautiful as the flawless crystal, all love, pureness, beauty, heaven. To be associated with the development of such ideas we ought to be really men of energetic minds and of high quality of soul, because we are not set here to prop up some little idol of an idea, but to declare the heavens, and to declare the God of the heavens, and to show that the crimson of one blood makes the whole sky rich with divinest colour. No man can injure the Christian idea in all its loftiness and comprehensiveness so much as the man who professes it and does not in any degree understand it. There is a process amongst some communions called joining the church; many persons are under the idea that when they have joined the church they have concluded their Christian education: whereas when our notion is large enough and clear enough we shall see that when we have joined the church we have only in a certain sense begun our education. Who are the people who grumble about the church idea and the church theory and the church conception? The same people who grumble about their food. Who are the people who grumble about their food? The men who do not work, lazy, indolent, self-destroying men. If they were out a couple of hours on the hills before their breakfast was partaken of that breakfast would soon become an almost sacrament; it would be such an answer

to hunger, such a reply to necessity, it would unite them with the all-giving heaven. Have no connection whatever with these grumbling people that are not satisfied with the Anglican idea or the Presbyterian idea or the Congregational idea, and who would like to have a denomination made to order, and made while you wait. They degrade the Church, they do not see in the simple bread which a mother may have broken the broken body of the Lord, nor do they see in the ruddy juice a drop of the infinite Heart. If we could get rid of these people the Church in its largest interpretation might make some progress.

If we take this principle and carry it round the whole area of human life, it will be a light to lighten the narrowest mind. We are to regard the child in the light of his manhood. We are not to trifle with children, saying they are but a few years old, and it really does not matter what we say in their presence or what we do ; they are children and they cannot understand the case, and if the child has a little ownership in this or in that it can make no particular matter that we should take it and use it for some other purpose, because the child really does not know what we are doing. And then the dear Christ takes cords and binds them together, and makes a thong of them, and lays it righteously upon our back, and says, Is it not written that of such is the kingdom of God? See the man in the child ; see all the rights of property in any little bit of string which the child calls his own; see the citizenship of heaven in the child nestling trustfully in your breast and heart. Thus take the larger view; thus interpret all things ideally and transcendentally. Look upon the heathen in the light not of their barbarism, but in the light of their possible civilisation, what they may be some day. People to whom you sell what rubbish you can get rid of, and whose goods you are glad to take in return, gold or diamonds, as the case may be, will one day by Christian influence be enlightened and educated, and turning back the pages of their history, so to say—I speak in a figure, but you follow my meaning —they may discover that we have been burglars who lived in palaces; what if their anger should then rise against us because we sold them guns that would

not shoot and took back from them such diamonds or other property as we could in any way secure for ourselves? Do not sneer at the black man, he may have a white soul. Do not say, This man is a foreigner, and therefore we may treat him offhandedly and discourteously. One day the word foreigner will be blotted out of all language, and man to man shall brother be. What a day of judgment may then arise, except the magnanimity of the man we despised shall forbear to recall the contempt and the injury which he suffered at our hands. Do not look upon the ward in chancery as a mere creature protected by certain duly appointed officials whose main object it is to pluck the bird as thoroughly as it can be until hardly a feather is left. That ward in chancery belongs to society; the humblest ward in chancery should be the child of the age, the child of the country, the child of the divine protective providence.

I beseech you, therefore, not to take little, narrow, and contemptible views of things, but always to follow Christ in His great broad luminous interpretations. Thus we may incarnate and expound by our daily life the great principles and the holy expectations which are the very marrow and sustenance of our souls. Never so live that in ten years the person we have attempted at least nominally to help shall find out that all the time we have been doing him secret injustice. Let me say to myself in the name of Christ and under the very shadow of His Cross, This child thinks I am an honest man, this child's life is in a secondary sense entrusted to my custody and culture; now how much more can I do than the mere letter of the law expects me to do? can I carry up law into love? The father of the child was my friend; instead of taking some green wreath of flowers to lay on his grave, I will do an extra service to his little child, I will try so to live that when the child has come to years of discretion he will find it no violence of language to call me his father. That would be Christian, that would be the spirit of the Cross, that would be the sacrament of love. Do not let us bind ourselves by the mere letter of the law, but say, What did God mean when He laid down this law? He meant it to be an expression of love;

bare law as a mere group or clump of letters will not do for me since I have known Christ ; I will so treat this child that when all the children, mine and this other man's child, shall have grown up together, they will hardly know which is which, and they will all know that there is room enough in this great big heart for each of them to pillow his weariness on my sympathy.

So Jesus Christ interpreted the temple ; He would have everybody under its shining roof and itself under the roof of His own love. I preach no local Christ. I preach no patriot Christ. He—my Lord, my Saviour —He called the Gentiles, and I am one, to enlarge the temple, and found a seat for me. He said "the world," and therefore I have some chance. He teaches "all nations," and if I cannot sit at the high table and hear all the greater lessons I can say, The dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the Master's table.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we confess that we have mocked Thy prophet, and that we have done despite to Thy Son and to Thy Holy Spirit. We have not understood the day of our visitation; we were busy here and there, and let the King pass by; we knew not the things that belonged to our salvation; we mocked the prophets; we said, Precept upon precept, and here a little and there a little, and a line here and a line there; we imitated their voices and mocked their accent and threw back their message in their faces. We have done the things that we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done; oh that we had hearkened unto Thy messenger, that we had accepted Thy terms of reconciliation and peace! then had we been strong men in Thy sanctuary, and as pillars in Thy temple. Behold our weakness, our want of gratitude, our indolence, and pity us from Thy great heart, Thou that didst redeem the world. We have been living among little things, we have not accepted the higher companionship of the angels and the spirits of just men made perfect; ours has been a life on the surface, we have not sought for the former and the latter rain, the upper and the nether springs, the morning and the glorious noonday; we ought to have been so great, so noble, the very princes and sons of God. May we not begin the better life to-day? may we not go in quest of holy things and reverently appear at the doors of the inner and upper sanctuary? We are moved to this prayer by the Cross, by the spirit of the Christ, by the blood of the Victim-Priest; Thou wilt hear it in heaven Thy dwelling-place, and answer it with a great forgiveness. Amen.

LXX.

THE VERIFYING FACULTY.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, MARCH 1ST, 1900.

"*This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing.*"—ISAIAH xxviii. 12.

HE Bible is always talking in our mother tongue. The oldest and greatest of the prophets spoke in language which almost children can understand and appreciate. Take such words as "weary": the child knows what it means when it sees its father returning from the fields and stretching himself in token of fatigue. And "rest," the little word needs no translation; and "refreshing," the very word which an apostle uses in later times when he speaks of "times of refreshing," new showers, larger rains, food in the wilderness, water among the rock. "This is the rest, this is the refreshing": it is undoubted, it brings its own evidence along with it, it needs no witnesses and no certificates and no chemical tests. It makes its gospel known, and the world says, Well, master, thou hast said the truth; this is right, the heart feels it, the inmost soul is grateful for such proclamations.

A wonderful thing is this verifying faculty that is in every man, the faculty by which we know whether a thing is true or not; a marvellous remainder of the Deity. He had almost been shattered, He had nearly been driven away wholly and absolutely from the human soul; and yet there lingers one faculty, instinct, power of testing, which says without words to the listening and wondering soul, This is right, that is wrong; this is gospel, that is superstition. A voice no other man can hear, only the soul can say in sacred monologue, That is it, this is the Christ, this is real preaching, this is the message that comes from God; there is no earth taint in this high wind

that blows down from the fragrant paradises and the upper liberties of the universe. That verifying faculty is in the body as well as in the soul; perhaps we can first familiarise ourselves with the verifying faculty in the body. My anxiety is to deliver these great words, and all the tribe to which they belong, from merely superstitious or even theological uses, and to show those who study the Bible with me that we have in our body and in our common life and in our common sense the beginnings, the germs, the protoplasm of the kingdom of God. Why will men flee away to some intangible cloud, and call that theology? whereas theology is in every red drop of blood that is in our arteries; the true theology is part of the very soul we breathe, it is the sign and proof that we had a great origin. Has the body a verifying faculty? The body has five faculties that are verifying, critical, judicial. The nostril—where does that word nostril occur? Where I have told you that everything occurs, in the book of Genesis, and ye will not, ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart, read it. What does the book of Genesis say about the nostril? It says that God breathed into Adam's nostril the breath of life; and it is still there, the breath that knows which is good food, which is bad food. Yet men deny or doubt the existence of God, not knowing who formed the nostril and breathed into it the breath of life. Yet I see the merchantman applying his nostril to this or that food which he would dispense to the public. What is he doing? He is studying one of the elementary chapters in theology. No man gave himself his own nostril; the nostril is, so to say, outside the man, and is revealing to him the difference between health and disease, foul air, fresh air, the air that has death in it, and the other air that is warm with summer and alive with the wind of health. So that the term verifying faculty ought not to be so strange to us. And the eye is also a verifying power; if we may personate it, the eye says, This is beauty, this is loveliness, this is proportion, this is statuesque music, this a poem in stone, a song in colour. Close your eyes, and the whole thing is gone; recall the verifying faculty, and behold what a universe we live in! even that small part of the universe which

comes within the range of the naked eye. So with the other senses. The fingers, representing touch, go before us and make inquiry and prepare the way; they are as messengers which prepare the way of the soul.

Therefore, grouping all these instances together, we ought not to be so very much surprised by the use of the word verifying faculty, or claiming and endorsing faculty, so that a man is enabled to say again and again, This one thing I know; what I do not know is your lucubration and your polysyllabled cant. So must we speak to the dear little souls who tell us even whilst we have blinded ourselves at the eyes of light that we might see with the eyes of the soul that this is all superstition. That is an easy way of getting rid of things that trouble us. Nor would I be severe with the youth who calls his father's religion superstition; there is a time in life when we really are sincerely fond of talking about things we do not understand; there is also a time of life, a kind of bank holiday of the soul, when nothing but polysyllables will give us any sense of manhood. Be patient; this whole matter will yet come right; who is there amongst us who has not passed through that measles period? If I heard a man more than forty-five years of age telling me that he once had the measles, I would cut the conversation short. So with the days when we regarded the great idea of religion as superstition, something that had in it nothing that was really valuable or that could be subjected to crucial test; we have outlived that period, and we must be patient with those who are still in it; the stairway to heaven, though golden, is spiral and long, and everyone is not on the same rung. Let us be forbearing and magnanimous.

What is true of the body with its five senses should be true of the soul. Why? Why should we hesitate to give things their larger interpretation? We have five senses or verifying faculties for the guidance of the body, and we are left absolutely without any verifying faculty for the guidance of the soul. That is impossible. We believe that the soul knows when it hears the truth. We have a feeling which cannot be explained in words, it may be psychological or metaphysical, but it is in the soul, a faculty or voice which

says, Beware; there is danger ahead; suspect this proposition; do nothing without further thought, and see that thou do nothing on a proposition which troubles the conscience and makes the soul narrower and less liberal in its conceptions and active issues of service and beneficence. This is the doctrine which the apostle Paul laid down when he said "the natural man receiveth not the things that are of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them: for they are spiritually discerned," tested, or verified. Why do not men carry these points of science into the higher life? The nostril says, having detected the quality of certain food, No! touch not, taste not, handle not. On whose authority? Mine. Who art thou? The nostril. Whence camest thou? Into me God breathed the breath of life; and I tell thee, O wayfaring man, adventurous, reckless soul, beware! Why should it not have its counterpart in the nostril of the soul, in the eye, the touch, the taste, the hearing of the soul? To have a body sentient and a dead soul inside it is to have a very beautiful and costly casket with a handful of rubbish inside. We could not believe it, our sense of proportion would reject it; we say, This is not harmony, this is not music, this is not the fitness of things. We would rise up in indignation and disappointment, and we should be quite right in so doing. Never, therefore, consult the natural man as to spiritual verities and spiritual realities; the natural man has nothing to do with such quantities and forces. My teaching is that we are not to go to the natural man to give us any opinion whatever about true religion. The man himself knows nothing about it; he has not passed through the great, deep, sorrowful, joyous experience. He may have his opinions. Who wants them? He may have his views and his fancies, but he himself would not be responsible for them if a flood came. If you asked him to attach responsibility to his views he would instantly repel the suggestion, and leave you to go to hell alone. Only go to the spiritual man for spiritual counsel, sympathy, and direction. Go to wisdom for counsel and to experience for sympathy.

We have in the text, therefore, an exercise of what

may be called the verifying faculty. We may take it by a very slight accommodation in that sense and way. "This is the rest, this is the refreshing." We know when an answer suffices a question. Explain that psychological fact to me. Take it in so small and insignificant a matter as a conundrum. You have heard the riddle? Yes. You have heard twenty guesses made concerning the riddle? Yes. Do any of them satisfy you? No. Here is the right answer, and the moment you hear the right reply you say, So it is, that is good; undoubtedly the answer is sufficing. Note what the case really is; you have heard twenty answers, and you have rejected them all; some of them are rather clever, acute, *ad rem;* yet there lingers in the mind a doubt about the whole twenty; but now that the real answer is given there is a unanimous verdict in favour of its sufficiency. You have had experience in so trivial a matter; yet it is not a trivial matter if considered in all its implications and practical uses; it means that there is in man a power or faculty or sense which says, That is right. Hear Christ's answer to the outside scribe. A man said to the great Teacher, Master, which is the first and great commandment? Jesus answered, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and soul and strength. The scribe said, Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth. The man knew it in his heart, he knew that was the right answer to the great riddle. And the Bible alone gives you the all-sufficing answers to the all-including enigmas. Why fool away our time by asking adventurers and empirics to give us answers, when the Bible overflows with them, and our verifying faculty takes up the answers one by one and says, This is right, this is the voice of God, this is the outlined kingdom of heaven?

Take for example the question of consolation. You are told that you live in a system of law, that you are encaged or enmeshed in a great scheme of fatalism, and that things come and go, and we must accept them either in their going or their coming. Are you satisfied? You say to such visitors from far-away countries, miserable comforters are ye all! Away with you! for my soul loathes this evil meat

which you set before it in its hunger. Who told you that these conceptions were wrong? You told yourself; the verifying faculty within you said, All that may in a certain measurable and momentary sense be more or less true, but it does not touch my hunger, my thirst, the sore of my heart, the agony that looks death into me. I believe in inspired experience; there comes a time when life so pulses and suns itself before a man's consciousness and a man's imagination that he himself has within his very soul the pleading and illuminating and solacing Spirit of God. Let some one come to you from the fountains divine, from the wells of salvation, and that man's coming is itself a blessing, his very way of listening is itself an answer which your grieved heart understands. When he says, "I will never leave you or forsake you," you look up in hope of seeing a radiant presence more beautiful than the presence of an angel, and when he says, "I have been with thee in six troubles, and in seven I will not forsake thee," you say, Lord, this is what I have waited for; it was the seventh wave I feared; the six billows have gone over me, but when I saw the seventh swelling into terrible strength and grandeur I was afraid between its coming down upon me and this voice I have heard, the comfort of God; and now I have no fear of even the seventh wave, it will thunder on the shore and dash itself into helpless bubbles, but I, trusting in God, shall remain unharmed, untouched. When the man who has the divine counsel says to you that all our afflictions work for good if we accept them in the right spirit, when he says, "They are not afflictions to be despised, to the poor suffering body they are very hard, why I have passed through just such afflictions as you are now passing through, and I never felt the dear Spirit of Love that died for the spirit of man so near me and so tender as when I was in that great strait," you say, Abide with me, stranger, preacher, pastor, abide with me, come in and break bread with me, and do not go away until I know that thou art a teacher sent from God. This is the exercise of what we have termed the verifying faculty in the body taking its proper place and function in the culture of the soul.

Now take it, secondly, in the matter of repentance. The prophet was offering this people in the context a very great offer. They were all drunk, they were all babbling mockers; when the prophet went amongst them they derided him; they had a gift of mimicry, took up his cry, and said in words which no English can represent, Precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little. It was mockery, it was chattering back the man's counsel into vulgar response. The words cannot be Englished, they cannot be uttered, and if they were uttered they could not be reported and printed. Yet these are the words which we quote, not intelligently, not knowing anything about the meaning of them—"Precept upon precept, and line upon line." We are quoting the words of drunken fools, thinking that we are quoting the words of the prophet, if not of the Lord; whereas these drunken, lustful, shameless men were mocking the sermon, mocking the preacher, mocking his looks, mocking what they would call his mannerisms—Ha! what again? are we imbeciles, are we little children, that thou art so mumbling, Precept upon precept, precept upon precept; and line upon line and line upon line; here a little and there a little, here a little and there a little—over and over again—begone! and the drunkards laugh as only drunkenness incarnate can laugh.

Yet the Lord made a great offer to them, He offered to teach them knowledge and to understand doctrine; He said to them, I will give you another opportunity: this is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest—repentance, be sorry in your soul's soul on account of your sin. We know at once that the answer is right. Only repentance can touch sin; it is not something on the surface that can be removed by a mechanical act; sin is in the soul, sin is so to say in the very tissue of the spirit; it is a grief against God and a grief in God's own heart, and God's only answer to sin is creating the possibility of true, profound, poignant and sufficient repentance. Repentance is not an intellectual assent to a misunderstood dogma; it is the slaughter of the soul that the soul may live, it is the soul laid upon

the altar that afterwards it may in the grace of Christ and faith in His gospel stand erect in a new manhood, in a new creation. If this is so, the answer is fundamental, vital, it goes to the very root and the very core of things. Such is the position and such is the claim of the Gospel, that it never cries Peace, peace, where there is no peace, it never daubs the wall with untempered mortar; it will have it out with the soul. Then began Jesus to preach and to say, Repent!—a word which the Church is in danger of forgetting, and, forgetting that word and all its implications, she loses heart and power and is numbered with the commonplace and the competitive.

Take it in the matter of obedience. Obedience is God's way to refreshing; obedience opens the fountains, obedience points the way that will conduct you to the living wells of the living water. This is the rest—repentance; this is the refreshing—obedience; go back to God and find what you want. When you have lost your jewel you must find it. Fool is he that goes a million miles away from the place where the jewel was lost in the expectation that he will find it in some other universe. The soul sinned against God, and the soul must by God's own grace and righteousness put itself right with God. That is never done in public; that is a secret, sacred act. Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in heaven, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly, and there in the humblest obscurity He will open the well of living water and give thee refreshment.

Then we take it, finally, at the very grave itself. We come to that awfullest of all sights, the descent of the coffin, the moment of intolerable agony, the dumb farewell, the speechless withdrawal; and there comes a loving voice which says of those who are interred in the hope of the Christian resurrection, This is the rest whereby He causes the weary to rest: he, she, is going to rest, to the last sleep, the holy slumber, out of which only one voice can awake her: this is the rest, this deep cold hideous thing, the grave, this is the rest. Then the soul catches the fire of God; it

says in words that cannot be heard, O grave, where is thy victory, thou cruel monster, thou terrible thing? It has no victory; she has found in thee the pillow on which she can rest her weariness. And this is the refreshing; this tomb is not a grave only, it is a well, a well of living water, and in a mysterious, ideal, but not the less influential and effective sense, those who go down into the grave in the spirit of Christ and in the spirit of His Cross find below it the rockspring of which, if a soul drink, it shall thirst no more. In My Father's house, said Christ, are many manses. On this text we have already spoken in this pulpit,—not terrified by mansions, but, translating the word properly, manses, man's houses, refreshment rooms. Jesus translated into our mother tongue, says, In My Father's house are many refreshment places, many refreshment houses, into which we can go, in which we tarry a little while and take what food we need; in My Father's house are many stopping places, lodgings for the night; away in the morning, for the morning beam is a call to further progress. The prophet offered them the true rest and offered them the right refreshing, but they would not have it; the word to them was still, Precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little. And they went and fell backwards, and were broken and snared and taken, and they are the fools of the universe to-day. What shall our answer be to the great prophetic appeal, "This is the rest, this is the refreshing"? Bless God for this demonstrative pronoun, the living *this;* it is one of the treasures of the soul. This God is our God, He will be our refuge for ever and ever; this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith; this is the way, walk ye in it; this, said the seraphic poet, this is the God we adore, our faithful, unchangeable Friend,—not a vague deity, an indefinite deliverance and redemption, but this specially and emphatically indicated, this, this is the God; not a shapeless shape, but a definite and living and loving presence. This is my God, this is our God, and we will trust Him.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, wherein we have forgotten Thee, and have suffered for our forgetfulness, do Thou in Thy great mercy through Christ Jesus our Lord forgive us all our sin. We confess our sin, we do not hide it even from ourselves, from God we cannot hide it; we have done the things we ought not to have done, for our sins we are heartbroken. We bless Thee for the house of prayer, for the open altar, for the daylight opportunity and freedom round about us calling us to nobler manhood and to richer service. The world is not so small as we thought it, it is a gate that opens upon other worlds that cannot be measured, neither can they be numbered, for they are as mansions in the Father's one house of stars. We bless Thee for everything that expands the mind, that gives us deeper consciousness of true freedom, and that leads us away from things narrow and little and insufficient. We now can say, because of the liberty Thou hast given unto us in Christ Jesus, Lebanon is not sufficient. Once we thought Lebanon very great, and we gathered under the shade of its cedars with somewhat of awe and fear; now we think nothing of that little tuft of trees, for we have seen the Lord, and our souls have become acquainted with the liberty of His righteousness and love. We bless Thee that we can trample the earth under foot; we thank Thee that time and space, always evil when not rightly known, are no longer of any consequence to us, for we revel in the presence of God, the Infinite Light, the Eternal Peace. Truly our history has been a history of sin and shame, and Thou hast ploughed us as with hot iron, and Thou hast stricken us through and through as with darts of fire; and we deserved every pang of pain, for we have sinned against light and love and mercy, we have scorned the tears of God. And behold, Thou didst send a famine upon us, Thou hast filled up the wells, Thou hast bidden the fountains to cease, the rivers Thou hast sent off in evaporation, so that in the morning we found them not; we thought we would prevail over Thine anger by sending our little ones to the well and finding water for us; but, behold, they have all come back poor, white-faced, disappointed little ones; and there is no grass. Let us fall into Thy hands, we pray Thee in the name of Jesus, and at the Cross of Christ, and give us that grace of repentance which keeps back nothing of sorrow that it may tell Thee in floods of tears how grievous is our sin and how bitter our sorrow. The Lord will then send us all the wells back, and every fountain shall spring up, and the maidens of Israel shall sing the great national anthem and say, Spring up, O well. Amen.

LXXI.

BIBLE WELLS.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 18TH, 1900.

"*Spring up, O well.*"—NUMBERS xxi. 17.

HE children of Israel had been having a hard time. This is the way in which God makes men, by driving them from pillar to post, by making them to live a long time in tents, and by commanding them to take up their tents and go on, no matter where; not for them to know, it is enough that God knows. Afterwards they will know and talk about it, and write stories for their children regarding their wonderful campaign. The children of Israel pitched in Oboth; and they no sooner got to Oboth than they went on further; and they had not settled down there until they removed and pitched in the valley of Zared; and thence they removed and pitched on the other side of Arnon, a place in the wilderness coming out of the coasts of the Amorites. Then they went to Beer, a very singular but most historical and enchanting place; it was the well whereof the Lord spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water. Cannot men live without water? Why, it is a mere nothing, and yet the world could not go on long without water. It could go on for ever without wine. "Gather the people together, and I will give them water," and when they got the water Israel began to sing, saying, "Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it." You cannot regulate the song of the people; they will sing when they want to sing—God bless them! There is an enthusiasm that cannot be mechanised; there are times when we ignore all leaderships and batons and signals, and the great gushing, loving, grateful heart makes for itself a

national anthem, and none can hinder. This was the national anthem, if I may so say, of old Israel, and you cannot improve upon it to-day under any complete and grateful review of life. Hear the song in part: "The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it." The nobles of the people digged the well with their sceptres and their fine instruments; and that is the right use of all things golden, silver, or jewelled. How foolish we are and altogether unpoetical when we stand with staring eyes and open gape looking at some staff or sceptre or jewel thing in a glass case, bearing this legend, "Touch not"! Then has the nation come to a pretty pass when its kings' things are locked up in a tower and locked away beyond utility or usefulness. Blessed are the people who can say concerning nobles and princes and mighty men, when the well was to be dug, they used their signs of rulership and office, and the golden sceptre was not too fine a bauble to use in digging a well that the people might be saved from death. What wonder that the maidens of Israel kept up this sweet song! It is in the air even yet. Woe betide any nation that forgets the memory of its well-diggers; they are the greatest men living.

He digs a well who teaches a child to read. You have made that child independent. Of course it may fritter away its dowry, it may disinherit itself or turn to perverse uses the greatest gifts of God and of society; upon that side of things we make no remark. But dig a well of letters, of learning, historical wisdom, and tell the child that such a well belongs to himself, not the less that it belongs to a great host of other people. The sunshine belongs to everybody; the sunshine is for me, and not for me, and most for me when most for all. Such is the mystery of the divine beneficence. Jesus died for me, but not for me in any narrow sense, but for the whole world, and therefore for me; for I thus get advantages which I could not otherwise fully and permanently realise. Oh! those singing maidens who by instinct or some kind of divine faculty catch the poetry of occasions, those singing hearts that hear, and then echo, and then repeat in broader note and phrase all the meaning of God as He lays the foundations of

the earth, and puts above all things a roof of more than gold. What should we do without poetesses, the poets, the seers, who see everything by apparently looking at nothing? "Spring up, O well." How utterly poetic; to the prosaic mind, how absurd, these maiden singers saluting, hailing, welcoming a well. They could not help it, for the Holy Ghost was in them, and the thing that was born of them in lofty song was the creation of the Holy Spirit. Probably it would be better for some purposes to keep the non-poetic people alive by educating them the whole seven days in the week, they are apt to be great nuisances. Therefore we want the church, the sanctuary, the altar house, where all things are made into manhood and vision and power of realising God. Possibly it may be of some consequence to have people reckoned as live members of society who have no windows in their life-houses, who worship a little starveling deity called reason, a small thing that is really satisfied with board wages and generally a starvation allowance, who thinks that to have the multiplication table is holiday enough and recreation sufficient. But we want another tribe of men, great singers, great deliverers, translators and poets, and men who insist upon it that before we rose this morning they were out and on the wet dewy mountain tops, and that there they saw the Lord. Madmen, of course! awfully destitute of proper appreciation of the multiplication table, but still singing through our poor prosaic hearts a trill that does us good. Whenever you see a well, sing a song; whenever you see streams widened by velocity of pace, hastening down the face of the hills, sing a doxology; and thus be wise, thou seller of merchandise.

How many wells are mentioned in the whole Bible? We cannot pretend to count them. Sometimes the well is in the singular number, and frequently the word well swells into the plural number, as if it became a gathering of waters and a meeting of singing streams. We find one wonderful well in Genesis xxi. 19: "And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water." It was there all the time, but the eyes were not there. But had not the woman eyesight? Yes, of a bodily kind; but all that

is sensuous ought to be typical and sacramental. "And she went, and filled the bottle with water." She only took a bottleful when she might have had a whole well. We might have more gospel if we had more capacity; sometimes we need a greater boldness that we may test the generosity of God; for saith He to those who draw from His wells, Bring another vessel, another, another; until the recipient says, Lord, I have been looking for more vessels, but I cannot find any. It is the receiver that gives in, not the Giver. She "gave the lad drink" — water drink, the true drink, the wine of heaven, in which no man ever found murder, lust, shame. "The lad"—that is a generic designation, taking in all the lads of the world; but in this particular instance she gave a nation drink, she nourished a nation in her bosom. Poor Hagar did not know the well was so near. But what do we know? If we have studied even elementary things, we shall find that God has left nothing in the singular number. If you find poison, you may be quite sure that a bush or two from where you found the poison you will find the antidote. The devil has always been hunted by the Saviour. Alas! it is the devil we meet first. Whatever you want you can have by the mercy of God and the presence of the Spirit in your own soul either by way of initiation or secondary suggestion, by specific faculty or by the great power of conscious dependence upon God. You need not go beyond your four walls for anything you want that appertains to the real and vital culture of your own immortality. John the Baptist gave all the people a great well. They were wondering what they should do, who would come next, what the development of force would be, and especially who he would be, whatsoever his name, who would play the part of goel or deliverer or nearest kinsman. John said, "There standeth one among you whom ye know not, he it is." Poor, poor fools! we have been stretching our necks over seas and wildernesses when the thing we were in search of was within the compass of our own shadow. Arise! be thyself! look with the eyes of the soul.

A great range of subject is started by this Hagar's

well, covering such suggestions as the unexpected supplies of life. We were at our extremity, and that extremity became God's opportunity. Also referring to the unexpected deliverances of life. We say it is always the unexpected that happens. "And, when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night," the angel of the Lord got ahead of Herod. But it came just as near as that, namely, "the same night"; not two nights before or a week in advance. Herod was allowed to make a fool of himself to the uttermost possible extent; so to say, the Lord fooled him to the top of his bent, and then when he would have gone forth, there was nothing to go for. This has happened in my case, it has happened in your case; this is a vital extract from the history of conscious and especially of religious experience.

Then the subject further suggests the unexpected friends, the human wells that occur or arise in life. This man will befriend me when I am in difficulty? Where is he? Gone. I am sure that I can apply to such an old comrade when this poor head fails and this poor hand can no longer serve itself; I will go in quest of him. And lo, he does not know me; he knew me when I was young and strong and prosperous. Yet I have friends and deliverances and supplies: how did I get them? You did not get them, God sent them; and the same night when Herod would have brought you forth to your mockery and contempt and derision, so far as society was concerned, the Lord sent His angel, and the chain melted at his touch. What did the Lord do to Hagar? Simply opened her eyes. Our eyes are not open. We think we see the things that are round about us, but there are no things round about us. That would seem to be a ridiculous speech, but it is real gospel. There are two great enemies we have, and they mislead us when not put in their right relation, and these two enemies are time and space. We make a great deal of them, we write books about them, we conduct examinations as if they were reality; and yet there is no time, and there is no space, except in some such limited view as actually would go almost to the length of destroying the very things which we think are proved. There is no church

round about us at this moment, in the sense in which we read the term church, namely, a building, a structure, a thing measurable and appreciable, and that could be sold by auction. In the very narrowest sense such a structure is enclosing us now, but in reality the true meaning is within that and beyond that, and so much within it as to rend it, and so much beyond it as to cover it with the derision of the universe. What we want therefore is eyesight, the power of seeing things behind things and within things, and the power of denying the existence of anything that is measurable and tangible. Hagar was taught that if she would only open her eyes she might have seen God.

And there is a curious little idyll about a well in this same book of Genesis—xxiv. 13: "Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water." They will all come to the well. You may not meet them in the field or in the wood or on the broad wayside; only now and then people come to such places or pass through them; but the well - that is the point of union, that the wedding-ring place. Perhaps we may meet these fair daughters of men in the gardens of spices. Perhaps not; now and then they may be there, and we may be fortunate enough to catch a vision of such living beauty, but I can promise you nothing positive about that. We may find them in the cornfields. Well, the cornfields are a kind of annual festival, there is a time when the cornfields are thronged with people; but I cannot make you any definite promise about meeting the persons you are in quest of even in the cornfields, but I can promise you that all the city will be at the well. What! is it water? so simple and poor a thing as water that will bring men together? Many a man has been in such straits for want of water that he would have emptied his pockets if you would have given him one vessel full of spring water.

We must watch for signs. The man who is speaking here is a man who knows well where men will be and women and little children; he knows that all the parish will bank at the well. Everything depends

upon the well of living water: watch therefore long enough and you will see him, you will see her, and through him or her you may see God, for God is at the well, He sits by the well. So Samaria's daughter may catch that wondrous eye-flash, she will look for some great vision. When Jacob came to what is to me the most interesting period of his life, namely, when he came to the blessing of his sons, he was quite overcome when the name of Joseph occurred to him: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall" (Genesis xlix. 22). Why were the branches so alert, so sweetly ambitious, so determined to see what was on the other side of the wall? Because of the well; the roots of the bough were comforted by the well; no man needed to water this bough; God had planted it by the well that never evaporates. Some men are specially environed; you cannot get at them. How gladly would cruel souls get at such men and tear them to pieces as the vulture tears his prey! But the men themselves cannot be touched. No jealousy, envy, cruelty, pious savagery of any kind can do them the slightest possible harm. You know it, we all know it; history is full of it; that is election, that is the concrete instance and demonstration of divine sovereignty. What some men would have given if they could have indirectly killed you! Instead of that they never even scratched you. What prevented their vengeance taking effect? Because your bough was planted near a well; it drank the living water, it was nurtured by the milk of the breast of the man-woman God. You cannot be fair to your own history and deny divine providence; you are a criminal sevenfold dyed in iniquity if you can stand up and assert that God has failed you in any crisis of your life. As for my own life, I see God everywhere. I must let Him alone, I may spoil His ministry.

I read of a curious instance of well in 2 Samuel xvii. 18, "They went both of them away quickly, and came to a man's house in Bahurim, which had a well in his court." Is it a fine house? I do not care; what I want is the well. Is it a large and beautiful house? These are trivial questions to me, I want the well. Where is the well? It is in the man's own court, he

has resources at home; he need not go out for water. In a very large sense we might have almost completeness of life at home. Some men could not live alone, they would call it solitary and lonesome, and they would be afraid of the silence. You know persons who dare not be in the house by themselves; what poor creatures; how little they know of the universe; what a poor definition of solitude is theirs! You know such persons; they are waiting for the glare of night's poor swaling gas; they must be out; the moment the drum sounds they begin to be happy. Can such people be saved? The preliminary question is, What is there to save?

Here is a corresponding well mentioned in Proverbs v. 15, "Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well." Have a city of the mind. There is an atheistical fidgetting; there is a yearning or a solicitude after outward things that would make the sacrament you drank in the morning of no effect. Can you not live on that sweet sacrament? Can you not listen and hear the winds? can you not close your eyes and read the Bible of the shadows? Poor beyond all poverty ever experienced by man is the soul that has no well in itself, the soul that is not independent of the holiday and the red flag and the blare of trumpets. "If thou knewest who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living waters, spring water, springing up into everlasting life." Again, have a city of the mind.

Does any other well occur to you? The greatest well of all. Jesus sat thus by the well, Jacob's well, Himself a deeper well, Himself, indeed, the creator of that well. Do you not read in the prophets this wondrous expression, "The wells of salvation"? It is a beautiful picture. Men are drawing water out of the wells of salvation, and as they do so they sing a sweet song unto the Lord; for who can be silent in the plash of living streams? Is it possible for us to make nothing of those wells? Alas, it is possible; this is the Lord's complaint against His people; He said, My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living water; and that is not

enough, they have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. You no sooner put the water into the cistern than it leaks away drop by drop, little by little, hardly a measurable quantity at any one time; but incessancy is the secret of ultimate depletion and humiliation. A man does not throw his religion away in one act of insanity; he does not rise up and say, I call the nations to witness that I abandon all faith and all prayer, and I abandon God Himself. It is rarely thus proclaimed, but little by little, a little cooling, a deepening indifference, an almost immeasurable alienation, dropping one service on the Sabbath, taking less interest in benevolent occupation, being more and more taken up by frivolous entertaining, evanescent things preoccupying the mind to the exclusion of the great verities that used in the older, brighter time to dominate it. This is the way, little by little, a drop at a time, and in a year, or a year multiplied by seven, and you may stand up a naked atheist, if not a blaspheming rebel. The Lord save us, the Lord keep us near the place of the holy well, the Lord enable us to drink deeply of the living river. Then shall our fruit be abundant in season and out of season; we shall be evergreens, amaranths that no famine can wither.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, wilt Thou condescend to show us the meaning of all mountains and rivers and wells and fields? Some of us have never seen the meaning of them; we have written their names on legal paper, but we have not caught the fragrance, the music, the poetry. Wilt Thou now show us somewhat of the higher significance of things; may we awake from time to time here and there to say with wonderment and appreciation, How dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. Hitherto we have but seen the rocks, we would now see the gate; heretofore we have only seen forms and shapes, we would now see the house, the home, unbuilt by hands, but sheltering all who put their trust in God. We humbly pray Thee to show us the meaning of every-day events; we have treated them frivolously, we have not gathered them into one poem pattern, we have not united the story of the day in manifold paragraphs and made of it a gospel sweet as the love of God. Oh that we had seen things and heard them and understood them in some part! for then had we been at rest, and our souls had not been troubled by the little things that move those who have no city of the mind. Come to us, we humbly pray Thee, in the name of the Cross of Christ the infinite Saviour, and show us that every lily has a meaning and every fowl flying in the midst of the firmament has a gospel in its mouth. Amen.

LXXII.

BIBLE MOUNTAINS.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, MARCH 22ND, 1900.

"*As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even for ever.*"—PSALM CXXV. 2.

HY this "henceforth"? as if a new thing had occurred in history, as if an unexpected Bethlehem had just heard an unexpected song. The Lord has always been round about His people; they could not have lived one moment without Him: all things are from eternity. God elected His Church before He formed the world. In God are no beginnings and no endings. We need such terms in all their clearest and broadest significance, because we are so little and frail and so apt to lose our memory; but when it comes to looking into the real state of affairs, the essential plan and purpose of God, then all things are just as old as God is; form and colour and incident may vary, but the spirit and poetry of things came up with God, and they are from everlasting to everlasting, because that is the measure of the Divine duration. We have already lectured upon the seedling parables of the Bible; we have been apt to think that the parables were features of Christ's ministry, and in a certain sense that is true; but parables are from the beginning, like all poetry that is true and all truth that is poetic and admitting of parabolical expression. Some have found parables and the all-inclusive parable in the book of Genesis itself; I think we could find it there if we were to look for it carefully; probably the word parable would better fit the whole occasion than any other word. "And Jesus answered and said." What is the Genesis equivalent? "And God said." They have always been the great

speakers, the only speakers, the speakers whose speeches were pregnant with all things living, true, beautiful, and of useful account. Here is a seedling parable: "As the mountains . . . so the Lord." Jesus Christ founded His parables upon those lines. "As"—then an interval—"so." So to say, God has built Himself upon us, having first built us upon Himself, so that all the wise talking and sweet singing of creation would seem to embody themselves in parables indeed in the bulb; now in the tiny seed small as a mustard seed, and now in great pictures that want the firmament for a canvas. "As the mountains." The Bible handles all big things, all things majestic and stupendous, and makes but small letters of them in its great literature of the sum total of things. The mountains are the capital letters of the landscape. Do you know what initial letters sometimes cost? Meissonier began his great career, or almost began it, by getting a fee of five guineas for an illuminated initial letter. The mountains are illuminated capitals, the hills are the aristocracy of the fields. And yet the fields are oftentimes more fruitful than the hills; in many an inventory the hills are practically thrown in; it is on the meadows and on the valleys that the gold lies.

Are there many mountains mentioned in the Bible? Are they lumped under one generalisation? They are not so massed, they are spoken of in detail, as if each were almost a living thing or a living church or pillars of some vaster edifice. Shall we take a few of those mountains in their parabolical significance? May we not bring them usefully into the whole action of our daily life and service and suffering? Some mountains are red with blood, some soft with dew, but both the hills were set up by Him who buildeth all things. Who can forget Mount Moriah? who could pronounce that sweet word frivolously? All the hillside is alive with thoughts, and the thoughts are almost winged things, fluttering and flying and shaking from their wings great suggestions and pensive yet triumphant memory. It was Abraham who said to the young man who followed him and his son, "Stand you here while I go up and worship yonder." Some worship must not be intruded upon; there is a place

for solitary communion with God, and the footfall of the dearest friend would disturb the spirit of the holy occasion. The two travellers climb the hill; the younger one wants to speak, as youth always does, and at last he summons courage enough to say, "Behold the fire, the wood, and the knife, but where is the lamb?" Isaac missed the meaning. Men do not know the meaning of their own questions; no preacher sees all the rings that form and widen on the lake of his audience at the time when the sermon splashes into the middle of the pool. Abraham said—it was the greatest thing that had yet been said in human story—"God will provide Himself a lamb." We know the rest of the narrative; enough for us that we tarry for a moment on Moriah, and see the poem of sacrifice, the first Gethsemane, the great surrender of the human will to the will of God. Yours has been a poor landscape if there is no Moriah. I want to hear what you can tell me about your Lebanon and all the hills silvered and carpeted, so to say, with tiniest flowers, each a diamond in its own way; but when you have shown me all these acres of hill I ask, Is there not another? We always seem to know when we are mocked by incompleteness. All these sons are noble stalwarts; but is there not another? Yes, there is one, quite young; he can be of no account in this purpose of heaven. Said the prophet, Bring him, we must have the whole number; the tribes of God are twelve, and though the kingdom was rent they come up again as a solid twelve; produce him, send for him, though he be in farm or field or far-off colony. He came, he was the king in the purpose of God. So with all these mountains we instinctively ask, Is there not another? and we discover that other in the hill of sacrifice, the mount of surrender, the place where a human will was laid down to be murdered.

Is there not somewhere a hill of fellowship, a kind of council-chamber amid the rocks, a high place where certain men that seemed to be the very pillars of society are closeted? Yes, there is a hill of that kind. What is its name? Tabor. You love the name. Are not names as birds that sing their own songs? Do you not realise even in Tabor solemnity, possibility,

suggestion? Who was on Tabor? Moses and Elias and Jesus. There must be hills that are as council-chambers in the Church and in the individual heart, Tabors on the top of which the most eloquent must be silent, and therefore the more eloquent. We may learn new languages on that hilltop, and yet through all the languages there may run a tone as of our mother-tongue. There are languages that we seem to know without learning them, just as there are songs which we are quite sure we heard in some other and fairer world, where the notes run out with a clearer tone and mean more than they can mean amongst these grey lingering clouds. Moses and Elias and Jesus had an equal number of listeners. Never take more people with you than you can possibly do without. There are hours when small numbers are great numbers, and when great numbers are so great that they become mobs and crowds, a tumultuous ochlocrasy, concerning whose uproars the great historic voice says, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" Let communion stop short of outcry; let communication be done in whispers, not the whispers of mere timidity, but the other and better whispers of genuine reverence. So to Moriah we must add Tabor.

Are there any other severe mountains in the Old Testament? Yes, there is one severest of all; surely this mountain is nought but rocks; you could not plant the simplest flower in those crannies so high and solemn. I refer to the mount Sinai, the mount of law, the mount where the eternal righteousness was, so to say, born in this bitter, gruesome Bethlehem. For law must descend into letters; the law is nothing if it have not its acts and statutes and decrees and memoranda and marginalia, meaning much to the trained eye, but nothing to the eye untrained. Law has its Thou shalt, Thou shalt not,—go, come, stand, sit down; a high imperative with some tone of cruelty about it. Law limits man, and thus gives him freedom; law builds man a cage, for it is all the space he can make use of in certain relations, and enough for him if the cage be so barred that through it he can see the sunshine and the moon-poetry of night. Jesus Christ said, I am not come to destroy Sinai, but to fulfil it; I am not come to destroy the law, but to accom-

plish it; I am not come to destroy the root and the branch, but to bring them to fullest fruition, so that there shall be the joy of plenteousness and the grace of a divine hospitality, in the north and in the south, far away on either side even until the whole earth become an obedience of love. Some persons think they have outlived the commandments; they think vainly and most impiously. The commandments ought never to be out of sight; I would show them in golden letters in every sanctuary, an appeal to the conscience, a kind of visible demonstration of the presence of the Deity, an embodiment of the spirit of truth. He is either a great man or a small one who is independent of the commandments. We may in some way plant beautiful flowers on the grim hill; that is surely not forbidden; or we may by the providence of God so enlarge the plain into garden land as to include the mountain; let it stand, but give it a new and blessed environment.

We tremble before Mount Sinai; all the incidents seem to be of a frightsome kind. If even so much as a beast touch the mountain he shall be thrust through with a dart. Have we not come upon better times? Have we not lived in a quieter light? Can we not do better with the dawn than with the thunderstorm? All this may be so, blessedly, inexpressibly so; but we must have the rock, and its companion law, and in our yearnings after something quieter we may find our holy prayer lovingly and sufficiently answered by taking a glimpse at another mountain. What mountain is that? It is Mount Hermon. "As the dew upon Hermon." Dew is often to us more acceptable than lightning and snow and crushing tempest, though all these may be sanctified and ennobled by the great voice of law and claim of righteousness. "As the dew upon Mount Hermon." Is there not dew upon every mountain? Yes, there is upon every mountain more or less, now or then some morning dew. Sometimes the dew is not spoken of; there is a time when we need something, so to say, deeper and fiercer than dew; so we do not read about the dew that was on Mount Moriah, nor do we read about the dew that was on Tabor, and certainly we never saw any dew upon Sinai, but the dew was there in each

case all the time. But who does not know that there are hours when certain thoughts take a predominant position, when a signature for the day makes the character and history of the mount itself? We do not see all things always even as we travel up the same hillside; now it is jewelled dew, now a wind that may overthrow us, presently a cloud that establishes sudden night upon the mountain brow: who can tell what it will be? The mountain has its changes, its new characteristics, so that sometimes we cut out faces in the rock, and now and then we see personalities in the cavernous places, now and again we think we heard voices, and we are sure of it, and we are not to be laughed or mocked out of it. The mountains have their diary of change.

Can there be more mountains in this mountainous land of the Bible? Yes, a hundred more; we can touch but two of them. There is a mountain I should like to see; it is the mount of vision from one of whose peaks men catch glimpses of the land they long to go to. It is Mount Nebo. I would not care to see the specific and nameless grave amid the solitudes of Nebo, it would be enough for me to know that one sorely tried life climbed the steeps of Nebo that he might catch sight of another land, while Jordan rolled between his poor old heart and that green Canaan. There are such mountainous times in the history of our souls. The Lord says, You shall not go into Canaan, but you may climb Nebo, and you may find a resting-place there, a soft bed for a tired body; as for the other place, you must take it in symbol; do not suppose I am disappointing you by not showing you what you call green and lovely Canaan; I will save all that, and you shall go in directly with a most startling immediateness from weariness into eternal rest, into the Canaan of which the greenest of your sunny fields is but a poor symbol.

It was so on Mount Olivet. Jesus climbed that Olivet hill that He might leave it for ever behind Him as a mere letter or a term in geography. The ending-place was the beginning-place in the history of Christ; He did not end on Olivet; Olivet was to the dear Saviour a beginning, the point at which He started, a

point therefore never to be forgotten. Blessed are they who climb Olivet, for they shall not die. The most beautiful sentence in the whole history of burial is to be found in connection with this same Olivet, as also in connection with old Nebo. Moses we know nothing about as to his death or his burial-place, and Jesus did not die on Olivet, but ascended; herein is the poem complete, the poem of Moses and the Lamb. Nebo and Olivet shoulder each other in the memory of a common and most blessed and significant history.

You can see all these mountains without going from home. There may be something in change, no sensible man would deny that for one moment, but as a matter of fact you can see all the mountains of the Bible without going out of your own sunny garden. You find these mountains in the clouds; but who cares for clouds? who reads the poetry of the clouds? Yet all the Alps are there and all the Indian hills, and all the rocky places and snowclad places, and all the places that seem to turn a little from you that you may see the places that are beyond them millions of miles beyond their snowclad shoulders. But some people would almost rather die than not see the Alps, if they can only be seen after the payment of so much money and the endurance of so much discomfort; then they think they have seen the mountain. I have seen them many a year in the sky, and we have sung together and talked together, and as it were wept together for very joy. What personalities we have seen just above the clouds! How often in the eventime have we almost heard the vespers of the upper church. If you would simply stretch yourself out on your native earth and exclude that earth and look at God's beautiful morning heavens, you would see all the mountains that are charged with messages to your poor life.

And is there not a place called Mount Calvary? There is not; all the best historians tell us that there is no such place as *Mount* Calvary. We sing with more or less of ignorant joy that "There is a green hill far away"; we are too much taken up with the tragedy to study the geography. But there is no Mount Zion.

What we call Calvary is a plain, yea, a flat place, and yet it was higher than all the mountains ; its history lifts it above all competition as to majesty and grandeur and fruitfulness. Enough for us that there is a Cross, blessed Cross, dreadful, holy, tender Cross. In my hands no price I bring, simply to Thy Cross I cling. Moses went up into the mountain to commune ; Jesus went up into the mountain to pray ; what is the difference ? It is still Moses and the Lamb, Genesis and the Apocalypse, or whatever other book may ever duly terminate the Book of books. What am I to do ? Speak some sweet encouraging word to me, O thou preaching man, say something that I can recollect, that I can treasure in my heart as a living jewel of speech. Is that the desire ? the answer is at hand. The text we have found in Psalm cxxv., the text you ask for is in Psalm cxxi. ; let us read them together. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even for ever." "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Hills, mountains, sanctuary places —they enrich the world. Blessed is the man who has eyes to see what is on the mount, if not at the top yet at the foot.

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

As a bird bringeth all kinds of food to her young ones' nest, and is nothing the better herself thereby: so some do only learn that they may immediately teach, not seeking thereby to amend and make themselves better.—*Cawdray*, 1609.

The preaching of the law is necessary to true conversion. A man will never be taken off from the opinion of his own healthfulness but by the preaching of the law. The law shows men what they are, what they may expect, etc. The fallow ground of the heart will never be broken up without the plough of the law (Jer. iv. 3). The plough of the law must go and make deep furrows before the seed of comfort be cast in. Though the preaching of the law does not convert, yet it helps forward conversion, inasmuch as it works that preparatory work without which conversion ordinarily is not. As the needle makes way for the thread, so the law makes way for conversion.—*Robinson*, 1559.

Take heed to yourselves, lest you should be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to the effectual workings of that gospel which you preach; and lest while you proclaim the necessity of a Saviour to the world, your own hearts should neglect Him and you should miss of an interest in Him and His saving benefits! Take heed to yourselves, lest you perish while you call upon others to take heed of perishing! And lest you famish yourselves while you prepare their food. Though there be a promise of shining as the stars to those that turn many to righteousness (Dan. xii. 3), that is but on supposition that they be first turned to it themselves: such promises are meant, "*caeteris paribus, et suppositis supponendis.*" Their own sincerity in the faith is the condition of their glory simply considered, though their great ministerial labours may be a condition of the promise of their greater glory: many a man hath warned others that they come not to that place of torment, which yet they hasted to themselves; many a preacher is now in hell that hath an hundred times called upon his hearers to use the utmost care and diligence to escape it. Can any reasonable man imagine that God should save men for offering salvation to others, while they refused it themselves; and for telling others those truths which they themselves neglected and abused? Many a tailor goes in rags, that maketh costly clothes for others; and many a cook scarcely licks his fingers, when he hath dressed for others the most costly dishes. Believe it, brethren, God never saved any man for being a preacher, nor because he was an able preacher; but because he was a justified, sanctified man, and consequently faithful in his Master's work.—*Baxter*, 1615-1691.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have come to seek living water. We seek it from Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray; He will give us spring water. We come that our thirst may be assuaged, that all our desires after God may be abundantly satisfied. We have heard that the river of God is full of water; we know that the streams of the river cannot be dried up; there is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God. Blessed is the man who delighteth in Thee as known in Jesus Christ our infinite Saviour; he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters; of the drought he shall know nothing, of the summer heat he shall be unaware. We have come therefore to seek water not at Jacob's well, but at a deeper, higher spring. In coming to these wells of salvation we come with rejoicing; the sound of the flowing water makes us glad; these streams are music; we would sit down beside them and rest, we would drink of them and lift up the head by the way and be glad as with a joy that must shout for very joy. Thou hast fed us and refreshed us and kept us all the way; Thou wilt keep the old the few remaining days, and the young Thou wilt make glad with a father's generous promise. We have committed two evils; we have forsaken Thee, the Fountain of living waters; and we have hewn out unto ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; but by Thy grace we have returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. We have done what we ought not to have done, and we have been stung by disappointment, morning, noon and night, and we have thrust our sickle into a harvest of darkness. We are ashamed of our sin, we hardly bring Thee souls at all, so withered are we by sin, so desolated by crime. Our desires have been evil, our thoughts have not been heavenly, and we have suffered at the root and core of our being because there has been a cankerworm testifying against us and threatening us with further ruin. But, coming in the name of Jesus, we come with a name that must prevail; He lived and died for man; for man He rose again, and is at this very moment pleading for man in the courts that cannot be seen. Deliver us from the great temptation to put away from us the unseen and invisible; may we close our eyes that the eyes of our souls may be opened, and may we see with

the eyes of faith and love God Himself, Thy very self, Thou bleeding Heart, Thou commanding Voice. We have been betrayed by our senses, we have been led astray by a perverted fancy, we are following a dream to which there is no reality; and we confess it all, and pray for the mercy of the Cross. Thou knowest us altogether: which is our terror and our joy, for if there is ought in our souls struggling after God Thou seest it and Thou dost reward us with the sunshine of Thine appreciation; and what there is ill in us Thou knowest altogether how it came to be there, for we have had fathers of our flesh, we have grown up out of a thousand ages, we are the last weeds of innumerable summers that have been wasted. God pity us and take us to the mountain where the sanctuary is, or to the valley where the thorn grows, or to the wells where the water flows that means the cleansing of the soul. The Lord's pity be round about us, the Lord's tears be shed upon our lives and very hearts, and let our prayer prevail in heaven because it is inspired and ennobled by the name of Jesus, Son of God. Amen.

LXXIII.

BIBLE VALLEYS.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 25TH, 1900.

"*The valley of Berachah.*"—2 CHRON. xx. 26.

WE have been spending some time among the caves of the Bible, and the fields and the wells and the mountains of the Bible. We have thus been able to compile a kind of religious geography. Let us now look at the valleys. The word valley is a poem in itself; it is associated with a great deal that is beautiful, comforting, and that gives the soul a sense of security and plentifulness. The Bible is full of valleys, as it is full of wells. You know this beautiful land of the mountain and the stream and the great flood and the green sward and the unexpected garden and the great and terrible wilderness—oh, that world of sand, that foe that mocks the spring, and smites the summer as a woman

might be smitten on the cheekbone. What is this valley of Berachah? In some senses I do not care much for it; I know it means the valley of blessing, and that the people, in whom I have not the slightest confidence at all, sang themselves hoarse in the valley of Berachah because they were fed like oxen that were to be slaughtered. I suspect some things, I have no respect for anthems simply in themselves considered; I must know their history, their meaning, their ultimate purpose. We sing lies. Perhaps even a dumb man might try to sing or growl a little if he were singing over gathered prizes and golden things and manifold riches. That is what the people were doing in the valley of Berachah. To me their blessing goes for nothing until I have deeply inquired into the motive of the hymn, the intent and the genesis of the ringing psalm. It was all right enough within given limits, but the limits themselves were wrong. No doubt there had been great victories, no doubt Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them that had been overthrown; and they found abundance of riches, and they stripped the dead bodies of their precious jewels, and stripped the jewels off for themselves more than they could carry away; and then they began to sing. I listened with reluctance to their selfish psalm. God might see some good in it; God sees good wherever it exists, in how poor soever a form. Sometimes the goodness is like a little starveling thing that has got no blood, no fire in the eyes, and no real trust in the soul—a kind of living, self-vexing speculation. Who would not sing in carrying off all these precious jewels? There is a better time for singing than the time of all this commercial aggrandisement and secular comfort. One little song of patience is worth the whole of this blaring noise; a sigh may be vaster in its meaning than an anthem; yet there was a victory; the victory was in some sort divinely guided and secured. There are fruits of war which may be legitimately gathered by those who have won them by strategy or skill or sharp sword; all that may be true, but I do not care for a national anthem that may not be through and through nationally honest. I never like to hear an atheist sing; it hurts me like a saw. Atheistic nations, not atheistic in formal creeds and ecclesiasticisms, should take care

how they add to the guilt of atheism, the guilt of falsehood.

There is another valley mentioned in Numbers xxxii. 9—"the valley of Eshcol." What valley is that? 'Tis the valley of grapes and summer fruits, all of which we may pluck, because it is the intent of divine love that we should possess ourselves of such luxuriant vineyards. Do we not suddenly come upon the grapes intellectual, social, educational, spiritual? Is not hunger itself often surprised by unexpected plentifulness? Yet sometimes men cannot believe even in this uncrushed wine of the grape; they will hasten home and say, Do not, we beseech thee, venture in that direction; grapes enough there may be, even to abundance, but we had better remain where we are; can a man live upon grapes? we cannot deny the purple fruit, yea, some of the people have brought large bunches of the grapes to show us what a fruitful land is beyond; but on the whole is it not better to remain where we are? On the other hand, having gotten into a land of grapes, our colloquy may proceed in a disastrous strain, having in it nothing of the hope and cheer and music of the coming day. Had we not better sit down by these grapes? We cannot tell what there may be beyond the river or on the other side of the mountain; here, you see, we have grapes enough; until we have drunken of this wine why should we strike our tents and go ahead? We may pervert some little mean proverbs of our own, and say, "Better bear the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of." We have grapes to-day: why should we care about to-morrow? We are tempted to go a flight higher, but who knows what is up there? or a league further on, but who can tell what lion may be in the path? Here let us rest like cattle that have browsing enough. Thus enthusiasm is killed, and all daring, high exploit, and noble endeavour. Ambition may be perverted, but ambition may be one of the forms or aspects of inspiration. It is the future that draws us on, it is the prophetic assurance of some fiery man that a mile further on and we shall have *it* that keeps the world young and keeps the rust away. Poor

fools they are these prophets! they are always raving about the years that are coming; they say they see them; they are perfectly sure that as yet we know nothing about summer or harvest or gladness; but there cometh a time when the land shall be a land of summer and the sky an infinite benediction. Had a prophet ever a comfortable day in his whole life? was a prophet ever able to gather his mantle around him, and say, This is perfectly sufficient; we will call this the millennium? Never true prophet. There have been liars enough who would have sat down anywhere if they could have found enough to eat and to drink. You cannot silence the divinely inspired and most restless man. We could rouse him and say, Now, why not be content? why not rest and be thankful? of course there may be higher heights and wider landscapes, let us admit all that for a moment; but why worry ourselves about it? there may be something beyond the grave; when we die we shall see what there is. Perhaps not; there is a right way of dying; there is an atheist's snore that never wakens in any land of summer. The world is kept going by its young folks; this is a young man's world. We do not want a young man of seventeen to talk as if he were an old man of seventy; we want him to tell us that the great Eshcol has not yet been reached, that we know nothing about what grapes really can be, and as to size, and as to quality and lusciousness: come! tomorrow we may find the great fruits of the orchards of God. Young men must be cheered along this line; they must not be discouraged by those who cry out, Peculiarity, eccentricity, something about very sensational. The world has been kept going by what foolish people would call sensationalism. The very persons who now wrap their rugs around them and enjoy the immediate comfort of the day owe the very rugs in which they wrap themselves to the sensationalism of a former time that could not be kept back from the wilderness or the jungle or the far-away land, no, not kept back by the roaring sea and the tempest that seemed to be an embodied destruction. Do not live yourselves down into saplessness and reluctance to move; let the dog gather itself into comfort before the blazing fire, but as for you young

souls, just bringing in upon us a new era, stand up, go forth, and return not but with the prey. It is a pity that some men allow themselves to become so exceedingly old; you need not attempt to guess their ages except you begin at the humble unit of one hundred; now then add to that unit what you like, because the souls to whom immediate reference is made have no to-morrow and no land grape-growing and far off. And it is easy for some persons to come and sanction such indolence, but we want the true spies that say to us, We have seen a land worth going to; it grows life, it is warm with summer, it is boundless with an illimitable hospitality. Young souls, do not be frightened by the man sitting next you, for he is no man, he is hardly a figure in wax.

In Hosea there is a glorious valley—"the valley of Achor" (ii. 15). What is the meaning of Achor in this connection? what is its broad significance, without going into the immediate geographical detail? what is the broad spiritual interpretation of Achor? It may be given in two little words, each word a syllable, one of the words a letter:—"a door of hope." Behold, I have set before thee a door of hope; I have given thee a new beginning, new chances, new opportunities, new mornings; this is not the end, this is the beginning; there is the great wall, go grope in blindness, but with finger-tips that can see; thou wilt in that great blank wall find a door; it is there, I made it, I made it for thee; I know the blankness of the wall, but on my word go thou forth and grope for the door, the Achor that will give thee visions beyond big as horizons, big as firmaments, big as outlined heavens: go forth in the spirit of hope. We are saved by hope. We are not saved by depression; probably depression never did anything for any man; sometimes there rushes through the heart quite a quickening stream of red blood, the meaning whereof is that there is even now something further to be done, and we are the men to do it. Tennyson speaks of our blood or lives or hearts being thronged with the pulses of the spring. For a few weeks cold east wind, the breath of the devil, may keep back such thronging and such sense of infancy and growing manhood and new opportunity; but the spring is coming, she cannot be finally

delayed, she is a maiden with a purpose, she has messages from God, she will surely come. Do you say so with your hearts? Yea, verily with a heart that has felt the bitterness of life and the joy of the Holy Ghost, and that heart says, that taking the year together, there is not more night than day. Let us sometimes go to the Church of Hope, where the preacher is a singing man, where he speaks in poetry and music of the highest kind, who every now and then comes upon a door, and says, That is the door; open it, and proceed. Beware of melancholy, the deathly, the manhood that has been degraded into a sepulchre. The voice of the Christian religion is a voice of hope. Realise that, and live as if you believed it.

There is a new beginning for you if you please to avail yourself of it. I have heard your story about lost opportunities and a wasted life and failure upon failure, and I have heard your dreary talk about having lost your spirits and being no longer able to take any interest in life. That is atheistic controversy; you had better know it, it spoils your life, it spoils your home, it casts a dreary cloud-shadow upon your whole environment; it is killing your wife, or killing your husband, or blighting the primrose of the childhood that is under your roof. What the preacher is set to do is to proclaim the door of hope; salvation by hope, hope that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. I know how bad you have been, I know that you have been as bad almost as I have; but there is still something of the sunny day left. When you want to sink down and fade away, that is a temptation from the devil; when you get a glimpse of youth, when you feel a throb of returning energy, that is the Son of God. Be a man; believe that the enemy thou hast not killed to-day thou wilt of a true certainty slay to-morrow.

In the book of Isaiah we have a beautiful valley; in chapter xxii. 1 we read about "the valley of vision." That is a large valley, that valley is worth living in. To live with people who have always seen new lights, new possibilities, and new and brighter interpretations than have ever been realised before;

that is companionship, that is resurrection. Who cares for these dullards who never see new lights, new companions, and the outlines of new springs and summers in the morning sky? What a poor life it is to live without vision! how small the life whose facts, often so miscalled, are never completed by dream. It is poor living without a dream ministry. You do dream—why not dream in the right way? We could have a stomachic dream, for which we must take medicine in the morning, when we might have a spiritual dream that renews the soul's health and lifts fact into true poetry. There was a young man who had a very poor little world. I want all young souls to hear about this young man. I tell no anecdotes, I am not telling an anecdote now. This young man had only one set of eyes; he went up to his master and said, The end has come; you see the enemy on the hillside there: what can we do? we are at the length of our tether, we had better surrender. The old man who never was in a passion except when he was in one—not one of those little creatures that have continual excitement without any spiritual madness—said, Lord, open his eyes! That is all. The young man became instantly an inhabitant of the valley of vision or the mount of illumination; the moment his spiritual eyes were opened he found that there was a circle within a circle, that the prophet was girdled with fire, that the angels were nearer than the enemies. They always are; why not believe it?

In Isaiah xxviii. 1 we come into "fat valleys." The poor drunkards were all lying down dead drunk and choked and suffocated with their own wine of fatness. They were pampered creatures; their soul was subordinated to the body, they were all flesh and next to no spirit. You cannot mistake the real drunkard; every pore of his skin is drunk, every action of his body is a reel; he breathes wine, exhales poison. There are fat valleys that have no fatness of the true sort. Then there are valleys that are spiritually rich with all manner of nutritious food. There is a wine that has no intoxication in it, there is a wine that does not carry the seal of death. Into those fat valleys, and not into the other, may God lead us.

Can Ezekiel be alive and not take his position in this great question of valleys? Ezekiel saw a valley, it was a valley of dry bones. Read chapter xxxvii. 1 and the context. It was an awful valley, a valley of dead men's bones, a valley of death, filled not with the sheeted dead, but with those that had, so to say, been blown to pieces by some great wind of contempt; and the Lord said, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And the son of man said, "O Lord God, Thou knowest." The wisest answer to every divine inquiry: refer the question back; let Him who propounds the problem solve it.

I wish we could read all about the valleys. There is a beautiful historical expression upon which we have already preached: "So we abode in the valley." We wanted to climb the green banks and get up to the points and coigns that catch the earliest kiss of the sun, but seeing that it was better for us to take another course, seeing that we had better obey God than obey our own fancy or whim, we abode in the valley. Abode in a dark, cold place? No; you are misinterpreting the word valley when you attach such epithets to it. I read of other valleys. The valleys are covered over with corn. That is never said about the snow mountains. Have the valleys no compensations? Is sickness itself without advantages? When you are weak are you not sometimes strong? The valleys for the oleanders and the vines and the crimson beauty; and the snow for the eidelweiss—poor little flower, yet a brave little thing that outwits the ice. Where did you get the little flower from? I know not that I have seen aught sweeter for many a day: what is it? The lily of the valley. Tell me there is no compensation in poverty, in sickness, in weakness, and even in failure and disappointment? It was in the valley that the lily grew. But the valleys are not the subjects of prophecy, no poetry has been written about the valleys? Wait! "Every valley shall be exalted." What do you say now? "And the rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked shall be made straight." Why? For the Lord is coming, and His kingdom is a kingdom of beauty.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee in the dear sweet name of Christ that we have heard things which are from above. We know them by their bloom, their music, their fragrance; we say to Jesus Christ Thy Son, No man can do these works except God be with him. We humbly pray Thee to give Thy word still broader witness; let men begin to feel in these latter times that there is no voice like Thine. We have been heedless long, and mistaken noise for music; we have lived in a confused uproar, all the time being partly conscious that we have not heard the true voice and the true music. May we begin to hear the voice now, may man after man say to Jesus, Son of Mary, Son of God, never man spake as Thou speakest. May we hear all His tones, may we make room for them in our hearts, that they may have a stilling effect upon the tumult and the sealike uproar. We give ourselves morning by morning into Thy charge; we join the innumerable company of angels and the holy ones invisible; we would be numbered with those who stand before Thee and carry the seal of Thine election. Watch our lips, keep Thine eyes upon our mouths, lest we see evil and admire it and begin to sing the praise thereof to unholy listeners. O come to us in the day of danger and the night of darkness, in the seastorm time, and keep us and humble us and chasten us and sanctify us by the Holy Spirit. Unto the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, Three in One, One in Three, never to be explained, but ever to be adored, be all the kingdoms and all the glories. Amen.

LXXIV.

BIBLE SEALS.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, MARCH 29TH, 1900.

"*Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.*"—SONG OF SOLOMON viii. 6.

"HE that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." How often does that word seal occur in the whole Bible? What does it mean? All things have significance. The value is often wholly in the meaning. The thing itself may be small enough, so small as to be almost beneath notice, if the question be one of magnitude and appraisement. We must look at the Biblical seals just as they come and go; we must as commentators have much licence in the matter of accommodation. Some of the meanings are obvious; some are implicit, they have almost to be dug out as if men were searching for silver and for hidden silver. Sometimes the seal applies to God and sometimes to the Church, sometimes to the foundation and sometimes to the internal spiritual witness; we will not stop to discriminate transient uses, we shall pause here and there to wonder what the little seal really means—a little tracing in gold letters written from different points of origin, sometimes from the right hand to the left, so that when any stamping has to be done we may find on the stamp the right succession of the letters. Sometimes in old story they will be like two lumps of clay, but without those balls of clay your paper would be of no use. When you write your cheque, which is the valuable part of the oblong document? Is it a cheque for £2,000? If so, of course the value of the cheque is in the poetical expression £2,000; never did any Shylock pronounce ducats so sweetly as we could pronounce pounds if

we got them on the right conditions. But are you sure that you have named the word or words giving real value to the piece of paper? If you think the value is in the sum, you are wroug. The value is in the signature. But would I not be well off if I had a cheque unsigned — a cheque for not less than two thousand pounds? No, you would not be well off if you had nothing but that blank cheque. The signature gives the value to everything: to the conveyance of the little freehold estate that you bought the other day. Show me the deeds: how elegantly written, how perfectly distributed over the face of the document! These deeds are of great value. Before I commit myself to that statement I must see the deeds; if there is no signature to the deeds, you may as well give them away, there is nothing in them until the signature and the seal are placed where they ought to be, and after you in presence of witnesses mayhap have signed the deeds, or they have been signed on the other side with the magic words, "I deliver this as my act and deed." Now the document acquires value. Many persons have carried their Christian profession just up to the act of signature, the act of sealing, and their profession comes to nothing. You may be sacramentarian or non-sacramentarian; on that matter you may please yourselves, I have no time to discuss it; but you must go through the sacrament of signing, sealing, or the paper is valueless. You are going out of the country for a few months, are you? and you wish to empower some one to transact your business for you, and you have given some man what you call power of attorney; let me see it. This is no use. Why not? It is not signed. But what can there be in a mere signature? Everything is in the signature. Why, the document to be of any real value must be signed with your own hand. There are some ways of making up for lame and infirm people, but speaking the general rule on matters of negotiation and commerce, the signature must be done by your own hand; and probably somebody will have to stand near you to testify that it was done by no other man's hand. They will not—may I speak it with some hesitation, because I am going to inflict a great suspicion on the human race—they will not allow

you to sign any important and binding document with the aid of a typewriter. You can write all you please to write with your typewriter, but not the signature. If the signature means little or nothing, you may write it with a typewriter, or get somebody else to sign it for you and to initial the signature, no doubt; there are many ways of helping lame dogs over stiles; but if the document is to be of any real binding legal force it must be signed by your own hand, you must give the name or give your mark, or in some way indicate that you have signed it with your blood or self or soul. What, is it so important a thing that it may be written with blood? Yes, symbolically, significantly; in the soul of it; it is red blood ink that gives value to your signature. So it is in wider spheres and in more spiritual relations. The covenant between God and His people is written with blood; the seal which we carry is a seal which has blood in it, at least by implication. We are saved by blood. There be those people so unholy in their daintiness that they do not like the word blood. They do not understand the sorrow of the universe, they do not know that sorrow is life, soul, blood, the blood of sprinkling, and the blood of sacrament. I revel with holy delight in my sweet Saviour's words, which bid me eat His flesh and drink His blood, and not perform something mechanical and without the deepest and most solemn and even tragic significance.

In choosing this as our text we are not making vivid—a process which is often allowable in pulpit exposition—a peculiar or distinctive word; we are engaged upon the unfolding and expansion of a long golden chain. This is a text of links, this is a poly-syllable of love, this the endless word, because pointing to the endless life. Would you hear a little of the drip, drip of the music of the sealing? Why, I could begin anywhere, but we might begin in Job: "He commandeth the sun and sealeth up the stars," as if they were quite little morsels of jewels, and He gathered them into one slender batch and tied some jewelled seal to them, and said, These are my jewels, to be gathered up on a given day. Or Isaiah: "Seal the law among my ——" and then comes a New Testament word. The New Testament in

Isaiah? Why, certainly. The New Testament is in Genesis. What is that completing word in Isaiah? Read the text again, and we will conjecture, now that you have given us the key, that the word is in the New Testament and in the very first part of the New Testament: "Seal the law among my disciples." We are familiar with the word; when we first read it we did not know the meaning of it, but we read on through Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel, and right away through into Matthew, and there the word disciples occurred, and then it often occurred, and then we thought we had always known the word—so ungrateful is man. And Job: "My transgression is sealed up as in a bag": I cannot deny the transgression, God hath produced the witness against me; the Lord could open the bag and shake out the black transgressions, the unholy jewels, and call my attention to the horrible proof of the horrible accusation. And there are books we cannot open. Curiously, our eyes have always been turned towards a book that we could not open and no man could open; we were sure the book was there, and we knew of a certainty that it was a most important document, and we said, Who shall open that book? and a voice loud as thunder said, Fear not; the Lion of the tribe of Judah, He shall open the sealed book and read mysteries and make them sound as if they were poems in our mother tongue. And in the Epistle to the Romans Paul speaks of circumcision—a mere flesh-cutting in itself—as a seal of righteousness. Some people never get further than the knife; some people never see the lancet beyond the lancet, the brighter, keener blade that cuts strange words into human life. And Paul in writing to Timothy of course uses the word seal: "Having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His." And what about Jesus Christ Himself? Can the Apostle John, who had the privilege of His breast, tell us anything about this Son of God? and John answers in these words: "For Him hath God the Father sealed." It is God's doing; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. And is there not another seal still? Yes, there is another seal, and it is Paul who reveals that seal in his great epistle to the Ephesians, for he assures those people,

"Ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." Then they are All in it—all the Deity? Yes, God, and the Son, and the Spirit; and you cannot get rid of these three Forces, this One-Three number, this Three-One power.

Thus the word seal is used in many significations, and the text now before us is not to be employed wholly in any one direction; we are to accept the image and apply it according to varying experience; we are to study the morning in order that we may shape out the day; we must ask where the wind is before we dare go out in such and such garments. It is the sun that tells you what to eat and drink and wear. Oh, how independent we thought ourselves! that we could say what dress we would put on, and of what food we would partake, and of what vessel we would quaff in order to satisfy our thirst; whereas it is all a question of the sun; let him retire behind his clouds and keep there for days, and it is one thing; let him come forth rejoicing like a strong man to run a race, calling in silence for the whole firmament to prepare the way of the light, and it is another. Yet we think we are very independent. We are when the sun will let us be.

Wonderful wearing of a seal is this in the Song of Solomon viii. 6—"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm." The whole idea of the gospel bondage—sweet, sweet slavery!—is in that symbolism. Where must the seal first be? "Upon thine heart." Begin at the heart if you would begin wisely; begin metaphysically, begin a long way from the visible, the concrete, and what is called the practical—poorest, meanest of the little heaps of dust that gather around the feet of our pilgrimage! Begin far away. You can always tell, perhaps almost by the voice, whether a man has come up a long way to face this subject, or whether he is making observations upon it that are of the nature of mere obiter dicta, little passing extemporaneous remarks, never thought of by the speaker and never remembered by the hearer. The great comings have been from eternity. Who is this that cometh up from eternity, with dyed arments from Bozrah, he that is red in his

apparel? whence obtained he that red dye? We are plunged into the abysses of the past eternity. So we must have Christ in the heart, a great secret, a solemn yet joyful silence. Christ and the heart must have tender communion; they have festive times that are not marked on the calendar; they muse together, they ask questions of one another, then come more nearly near; in the soul there is a mystic wedding without which any other wedding is blasphemy, an oath broken at the altar. The Scripture gives us a large use of the word heart; it is not mere emotion or affection. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and soul and mind and strength": the word heart as used here is not a physiological term, it does not refer to that little muscle we call the heart, and which we can cut out and put in a bottle; it means the whole nature, soul, spirit, conscience, imagination, and the inmost desires after light and life and fellowship. Seal mine heart, stamp my whole nature with the stamp of heaven. I cannot read that stamp until it is brought to bear, as we have already said, upon the molten wax or the molten heart; then that which once looked written in the wrong direction is brought down, and henceforward it is written from the left to the right, and on to the right, and still on to the right, an endless hallelujah. The heart is the true character: "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Not what we say in open ordinary conversation, not what we do in the plain grey daylight of these under skies, but what we think without saying; when we look at a man without the man seeing us except in the crude flesh, and thinking he detects a smile wreathing itself around the supple lips: whereas in our heart there is a smile, but of contempt and depreciation. As a man, therefore, is in his heart, or thinketh in his heart, so is he in reality. The Lord seal mine heart, set His seal upon my affections, desires, imaginations, and aspirations; then I shall be true through and through, my nay will be nay, and my yea will be yea, and there shall be no breach between mine honour and my fear of social criticism—the deadliest, meanest nettle that grows in the hedgerows of the world.

Then set thy seal upon mine arm or thine arm:

there is a time for protest, confession, public profession of the Eternal Name; there is a ministry of symbolism, there is a way of walking that means that the pilgrim has a sanctuary in view; there is a mysterious influence upon the attitude, the figure, the dress, the whole tone and speech of the life. What is it? We often call it the profession of the name of Christ. Some of us would perhaps under certain circumstances turn our clothing so that we could conceal the seal from everybody; and there is a way to be equally detested, and that is an opening and showing the seal as if making an investment and testimonial and credential of it. There is another way, the way of true modesty, gentle but invincible love that is not ashamed of Jesus or ashamed of the Christian seal. I call for more open, loyal profession of the Son of God.

> "Ashamed of Jesus! sooner far
> Let evening blush to own a star."

Have we the seal? The order of the sealing cannot be reversed. We have a miserable trick of inversion. There is a sequence of things, there is a logic of events; things do not happen oddly and eccentrically and unaccountably; there is a stern law of logic: first the heart, then the arm; never, never first the arm, then the heart. The heart will show itself on the arm; the inward and spiritual grace will show itself by outward and visible works, great and beneficent realities. O man of God, never lower thy flag in the presence of the enemy. If you have a conviction, be true to it; though it be not my conviction, it is your conviction wrought out by careful study, verified by deep experience, vindicated by a course long continued of self-sacrifice and honourable service; cling to it, and thou shalt, my brother, be respected by every man who respects truth and adores God. Long, long ago, quite in the time of the old, old folks, people used to speak about adhering to their church; some spake quaintly about joining the church; others gladly availed themselves of sacred ordinances whereby they might testify from personal experience that God is good and His grace an unfailing fountain of sympathy and helpfulness. Then there came over the times a most cloudy atmosphere; tongues that were once eloquent with

honest confession of Christ began to say less and less about the Saviour and His Gospel; then they said they had ceased to speak so much because religion was too sacred a thing to be spoken of. It was a lie, the devil's miracle! Show me a mother who is regarding her baby as too sacred to be spoken about, and you show me a woman that I will for ever avoid.

What seal have we? What seal has my poor life? Have I ever spoken coldly of my Saviour? Has there ever been any mistake as to which side I was upon? Did some person or persons merely suggest, This fellow was also with Him? And did I try to alter the accent of my voice in order to escape suspicion? Did I throw myself into some momentary disguise that I might escape the censure, the acrimonious word, ay, the axe and the saw of persecution? Have I been faithful to my trust? Do I go home and stab myself with a sword two-edged because I was a coward when I ought to have been a hero? Did I sell my Lord for thirty pieces of silver and throw the seal away lest anybody should think I was other than a man of the world and a reveller in poison cups? Do not let us condemn one another; let him that is without sin cast the first stone. I would pray for the modesty that wears the seal right openly, and for the modesty that expresses the loyalty—grand, invincible, unchangeable—of the heart conscious of its redemption by the precious blood of the Son of Man, the Son of God.

PRAYER.

GOD be merciful unto us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us; God be merciful unto us, sinners! We have broken Thy law, we have defied Thee to Thy face, we have turned our back upon Thee, we have resented Thy reigning over us. Pity us, notwithstanding all! We are foolish and we are wicked, and we know not that which concerns truly and for ever our peace and our progress Thou knowest our frame, Thou rememberest that we are dust: what are we but as a wind that cometh for a little time, and then passeth away? What is our life but a vapour, here a moment and gone? We are as a post pass ing through the hills and the valleys, hastening upon His errand saying, The King's business requireth haste. We are of yesterday and know nothing. The Lord pity us, and spare us, and let our cry reach His heart, for we are but children of time. Yet we can pray unto God in the name of Jesus Christ; so we are more than the children of time. Thou hast set eternity in us, Thou hast given unto us the music of the everlasting; we know it and feel it and express it, and then we fall back into the commonest mortality. God pity us! What fools we have been! Oh that we had hearkened unto Thy law and kept Thy commandments! then had our peace been as a river, and our righteousness had been as the waves of the sea. We cannot recover the past, we are helpless as to yesterday; but the blood of Jesus Christ Thy Son cleanseth from all sin; He can go back through all our yesterdays and cleanse them and make them as vessels meet for the Master's use, and can gather up all the scattered days and shape them into one meaning and crown them with one glory. What wonder if our trust is in the Lord, and our expectation from Him that built the heavens? We have no resources; our inventions are many, but poor; we must go back to Thyself, up to Thy throne, and follow out all Thy law by the help of the Cross of Christ Jesus our Lord. Pity us, pity us! we live in Thy pity, we have no hope but in Thy tears and all that those tears mean. Yet Thou art our Rock, and our Refuge, and our Shelter, our Hiding-place, the Church in which we find shelter, asylum, and rest. The days of our years are few, they are but a handful at the most. O be not angry with us, nor plead against us with Thy great power; for who can stand against the thunderbolts of God? May we come to Thee through the Cross, and whisper in Thine ear that we want mercy, and that we die but for the Cross. Amen.

LXXV.

THREESCORE YEARS AND TEN.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 8TH, 1900.

"*The days of our years are threescore years and ten.*"—PSALM XC. 10.

MERE handful, not worth talking about, coming and going and vanishing, and leaving hardly any trace on the memory, but many scars and wounds on the heart. I have no intention of speaking what is known as a conventional sermon; I cannot keep myself sufficiently under control for that. I have wasted seventy years of life, wasted nearly all the days. I have had glimpses of better things and made some efforts after them, but, taking them as a whole, I am ashamed of them, and wish, with some reservations, that I had never lived them. "Would you live your life over again if you could?" Not for ten thousand worlds, every world a diamond. "Has it been so very disappointing and bitter?" Much more so, with exceptions, marked, brilliant, emphatic, for ever memorable, the roots and sources of new hymns and psalms and hallelujahs greater than ever blown by the trumpet. But it is on the whole sad enough, mysterious. Why is it so? The little child dying before it has uttered its first word, and the old man sighing to be released, and God reigning over all. They say God is love; this is said by millions of grateful hearts and voices, and I gladly join that infinite chorus: still we sometimes feel so sad that the thorn lives longer than the rose.

And yet the whole ever-shifting mysterious thing we call life is full of hope and parable and morning; still there is the morning star, that child of hope, that centre and source of infinite light. There is not a heart here in all these multitudes of people that has not been broken or will be broken. Every man is on the way to his own grave; yea, though he be laughing at the graves of others or heeding not that

they are passing by him in blackness, the dead that are going to be buried, yet the fool is on the way to his own last freehold. Oh! that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider the latter end, bring it to bear upon the mutations and the disappointments and sorrows of the present time, and thus secure balance and massiveness and mute music.

There are three things that keep always before me, and that give me a measure of steadiness, and that keep me from suicide; I will tell you what they are, and they may be of help to you sometimes when your knees give way and you are reeling as if drunk, but not with wine.

(1) The first idea that comes to me in these moods is that life is short—yet so long. It is a contradiction in number; it is a paradox in reality. How short our life is! A flash—gone! How long! when will this black-robed procession unwind itself and get around the road and pass the corner that we may not see it any more? Yet life is short; for it is like unto something that is evanescent when it is treated of aright. It is a post among the hills and the valleys; it is a smoke rising up and fading away; a wind that comes for a little time, and then passeth on to blow on other acres and other worlds. What is life? An evaporation, something always going. Now there are some persons that would call this pessimistic. But they do not know what they are talking about. We must be pessimistic before we can be optimistic. We must get down, down, before we can really begin under the divine handling and shaping of things to get up into shape and structure and palace-like magnificence and beauty. Do not put much trust in people that are afraid of the melancholy, that say, Pass on, pass on, another dance! Put no trust in these fools; they live in giddiness, in tramping and stamping, in leaping up and down, in forgetting themselves, in murdering God. Believe me, they are not optimistic; they are bubbles that rise and gleam and perish, and are forgotten. Yet life, I repeat, is short; short to look back upon, long to look forward to in some aspects and from some starting-

points. When we were children, how long it was from one Christmas to another! Now we speak of next Christmas as if it were here and simply waiting to be called at the tinkle of a bell. But life being short means a great deal. This is not a commonplace platitude. We think that if a man should say in a great high pulpit, "Man is mortal," that he is speaking a platitude. He is speaking all mysteries in one. We are the platitudes if we make a platitude of so profound an observation as the mortality of man. How suggestive it is! If life is short, what are the best things in it, the wisest, the deepest? Let me get hold of them. If life is short, what is the most important thing to be done? There are things to be done that are of varying importance and degrees of value; tell me, O sir, if thou knowest, which is which, where is the accent, the emphasis, the responsibility; I do not want to fool away my time, I want to get hold of the most living, pulsing, throbbing moments, and get out of them what immortality I can. If life is short, then I think it will be wiser on my part to leave the mysterious alone; I think so. Why so? Because life is short; we cannot do everything: we had better, therefore, make a selection, and attend to those things we can get hold of, and work to the soul's best advantage. Why should I, with so few days at command, trouble myself seriously and to the possible destruction of my soul by constructing theories about the constitution of the Godhead? Why should I break up my life by trying to reconcile the various theories of the creation and existence of the universe? I have not time; if I had talent, genius, inspiration, in these directions, I have not time, I am but a pilgrim, I can tarry but a night: O tell me what is the thing to be done now? So many people are mooning away their time as if they had a whole eternity to spend, and they pay so much attention to things that can help the individual soul but little if any at all, and they neglect the weightier matters of the law. Tell me that my age will be ten thousand times ten thousand years, and I say, My brothers, halt! let us look into this weed: how did it come to be what it is, what other weeds are there round about its neighbourhood, what is the relation of these various and apparently competing

weeds; and halt, let us gather a thousand little shells from the seashore, and number them, and appraise them, and wonder about how long they have been in their evolution. There might be some little grain of sense in that, but when you tell me that the days of our years are threescore years and ten, I must reconsider the whole calculation, and get to understand if I can which is the more important, which the most important, what is the thing to be done now.

What is your life? Seventy years. Nothing of the kind; this is quite a poet's mistake. My life threescore years and ten? Oh no, no. What are you up to about five? Well, not much. There may be five years struck off the seventy for many purposes of life; now you are sixty-five. How much of your time do you spend in sleep? Why, I am told that from six to eight hours out of the twenty-four should be given to sleep. Why, that is a third of your lifetime. And what is the third of sixty-five? and deduct that from sixty-five; why, the days of your years are getting down to about forty. And how many of those days and years will you spend in weariness and weakness, under the doctor's care and the nurse's attention? and you think the business in the City is in great danger because you are not there. What does that bring your life down to? It takes off some years. So it may. And then you have what you call your holidays and recreations—yes—when you are supposed not to be strenuously engaged in life, but to be recruiting and renewing and gathering up your strength for some further effort. How does your age stand now? You began with a store of threescore years and ten, according to poetic license; where are you now? So this little quantity is encroached upon sometimes, turned to waste: and what time have we for the deeper thought concerning the deeper life? Well, we are so busy that we have abolished family devotional exercises; our fathers used to be given to that sort of thing, but now—the train, the 'bus, and I am due in the City in an hour. How much time is there for the really important and solid thinking that ought to form part of every life that means to end in something worthy of manhood?

That is the first thought that gives me steadiness. Life is short, therefore I can intermeddle with only a few things, therefore I had better consider which are the truly great and worthy things; therefore I must buy up the opportunity, redeem the time, and make the most of this dower more than gold with which God has blessed my personality. Then life is so long. Oh! when will the reunion take place? when will the child be here again? And even if I have to meet her at the train or at the coach, will I know her very clearly? She will be so tall, so changed; she is leaving her girlhood and childhood behind her: surely that is not the child I came to meet; I do not quite recognise her. How then does the recognition take place? On her side? She recognises you; middle-aged men do not change so much as the girl changes. There are shaping and settling times in life, and then there is a period in life, say from figure one to figure three, where little change takes place, and in that period we think we are getting rest and hope: whereas it may be but a kind of daylight slumber, a forbidden and interdicted dream. Poor man! think of thy life: what a small thing it is and how great; greater than the sun. Pascal said, "I am greater than the sun." How so, philosopher? "The sun," replied the sage, "could fall and crush me, but I am greater in that I should know that I was overpowered, but the sun would not be conscious of victory." Our greatness is in our consciousness, its largeness, its intelligence, its sanctification; that is how we stand.

(2) And not only is life short, but life needs help. The strongest man will say that; however rich a man is, he cannot do without some other man. There are times when it is so dark that even the outputting of the hand is a gospel. Oh to feel a holding hand, a familiar grip! it makes the darkness light, it brings sustenance to the soul. We cannot do without one another. The weakest may help the strongest. Paul said, "Brethren, pray for us." There is the mightiest man in the Church asking some man and woman heart to pray for him, when the water is deep and cold and the night so dark. It is a wonderful thing this, that we all need help, if not

to-day, yet to-morrow. A man has ten thousand acres, and yet he feels sometimes as if the hug of a little child round his neck would be worth the whole ten thousand ten times over. The man cannot live upon acres, the man cannot live upon balances at the bank; he does not despise any of them, but he puts them into their right place, and he says, "Oh for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still!" And sometimes he thanks his little lonely fire for throwing shadows on the wall which he can turn into pictures, into more than animated photographs. Let the very humblest man know that he may one day have it in his power to help the very strongest man he has ever known. It may not be in any grand and dramatic way. A child can open the gate for a horseman; a mouse may let a lion at liberty; and the very poorest creature can put a terrible check upon atheism. A poor woman left with her eight children and hardly a crust in the house or a coal in the grate may fall apraying, and open the Bible at some grand psalm, and wet it with her tears, and pledge God to it; and somehow, she could not tell how, but somehow the angel came and help arrived, and the darkness was mitigated, and the morning dawned upon the far-off hills, and she took heart again; and boy after boy went out and turned out to be good and helpful and useful, and at the end of a long period of trial she says to the atheist, "What has your no-God done for you, you fool? This is what my living God did for me; what has your no-God done for you?" And before you can destroy that woman's argument you have to destroy that woman's character; she is living, she is there to sign, seal, deliver, corroborate.

That is the second thought that comes to me, that life needs help and true sympathy, just a hand to ease in an extremity.

(3) And a third thought is that no help that can be given to man is so gracious, so complete, as the help that is given by the Son of God. On these three grounds I stand; millions stand on the same grounds and praise the same Saviour. Jesus Christ comes to

us when other people are engaged with the feast and are pledged to the dance and have no time for old sorrow and wordless misery. Jesus Christ says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble"; nobody else will want to see you; call upon Me; look in your diary, and you will find the day of trouble is a disengaged day, a vacant line; others will come to you on all the other days, but call upon Me and I will fill up that space for you. Jesus Christ will go where no one else can go. Jesus Christ discusses with us, so to say, the very deepest subjects; Jesus Christ never shrank from any topic. There are those about us who say, Do not mention that, if you please, that is very ghostly; what do you think of the weather? what is the prospect for the crops? when is the next merry-making to take place? O tell me, and do not talk about these subjects! Never trust such people with a single coin of the realm; they are rotten, they have no souls, they have outlived themselves. Believe in the people who believe in tears and tenderness and healing sympathy; they are your real friends and your best friends and your truly approachable friends, and the greater they are the more approachable they are. Jesus Christ never casts any of His trusting ones off. The devil is always getting rid of his clients; he does not know them after a certain time; when they have drunk themselves up to the point of satiety he shakes them off; he says, These fools! I need not trouble about them any more; let them go into the gutter, and into any river the gutter can find a channel into; I must be after the young, the fresh, and the beautiful, and those who are comparatively inexperienced, and I am content to let the others alone. I have seen a man who represented millions rot, and I should have considered it a dishonour to have been called in to inter his bones; I would not be called in; there is a pestilence, a reek, that it is dangerous to go near. But Jesus Christ has gone to people who have had one foot in hell; to one man He said, To-day thou shalt be with Me in the unseen, the Hadean world, the paradise that can only yet be dreamed about. Jesus Christ can give comfort when no other one can give any consolation. Oh, He has a seven-fold voice! I have heard Him, so to say, when He has spoken to scribes and pharisees, so

that they have gotten angry with Him to the point of madness and murder, or have been insulted and affronted and humbled, and have gone out like stricken dogs. I never knew Him so gentle in His voice as when He spake to people that had got wrong and who knew it, and who came near Him thinking that they could elude His eyes and yet steal His virtue; but they could not. He said, Rise—mother, sister, friend—rise, thy faith hath saved thee. People went up to Jesus Christ fifty and sixty and seventy years old, and came back from the touch of His robe children in their teens, so vernal looking, so tender, so recruited, so renewed. And He is the same living Christ to-day, and as near to us as ever He could be in the flesh, yea, more nearly near, for He is nearer to us than we ever could be to ourselves.

"Happy, if with my latest breath
I may but gasp His name;
Preach Him to all, and cry in death,
'Behold, behold the Lamb!'"

I have seen the Saviour in sick-chambers these fifty years of ministry; I have met Him again and again, as it were, by appointment of His own making, and I have seen Him in the sick-chamber—no woman so gentle, no nurse so careful, no doctor so healing. He enters the sick-chamber without opening the door; He considers the fever that is burning the patient, and says, No noise must be made here. So the Saviour came into the room as the light came. Who ever knew the sun to thunder at the window and say, I want to come in? Never. O the might of silence, O the poetry of stillness! He has always been gentler to the patient or sufferer than to any one else in the room. Only the dying have seen Death. We think we have seen Death, but we have not. To us he comes as King of Terrors; he is going to commit robbery on our own premises, he is going to impoverish us. But how easy to die! It is the living that is the hard part. When such friends die, who has really died? We will say with the great poet that when such friends part 'tis the survivor dies.

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

It is happy for him that teacheth others, to be himself righteous. It is absurd in him that stammers, to teach others to speak plain. Great learning and good living are a fair couple, a fit match; it is a pity to part them.—*Adams*, 1654.

That preacher who presseth a duty (though with never so much zeal), but doth not chalk out the way how it is to be done, is like one that brings a man to a door that is lockt, and bids him go into the house; but gives him no key to open it; or that sends a company to sea, but lends them no chart by which they should steer their course.—*Gurnall*, 1617-1679.

The praise of a good speech standeth in words and matter: matter, which is as a fair and well-featured body; elegance of words, which is as a neat and well-fashioned garment. Good matter, slubbered up in rude and careless words, is made loathsome to the hearer; as a good body, misshapen with unhandsome clothes. Elegancy without soundness is no better than a nice vanity. Although, therefore, the most hearers are like bees, that go all to the flowers; never regarding the good herbs, that are of as wholesome use as the other of fair show; yet, let my speech strive to be profitable, plausible, as it happens. Better the coat be misshapen than the body. —*Hall*, 1574-1656.

As a careful and skilful surgeon, who, having patients that are diseased with sundry grievous wounds and sores, and having provided drawing plasters and corrosives for the same, doth not commit them to his patients, that they should lay and apply them to their sores and wounds, lest they should withdraw and keep back the same plasters from their sores and wounds, and so seek to free themselves from the smart and grief which would ensue and follow upon the laying to of the said plasters and corrosives to their festered sores and wounds, and therefore he will not trust them therewith, but doth himself both lay and apply the same plasters and corrosives to their sores, and will himself cut out the corrupt and rotten flesh that groweth to their wounds: even so it is not enough that a preacher should deliver unto his auditors and parishioners a general doctrine, and so leave the application thereof to themselves, for (as it is commonly said) that which is spoken to all is spoken to none; but he ought so to apply his doctrine, that every one of his hearers may have his portion, and thereby well perceive that it is spoken to them—as the prophets and apostles have done.—*Cawdray*, 1609.

PRAYER.

WE trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel; and, behold, He is on the Cross, helpless as the thief on either side. There is a dead trust in our hearts, our ambition is perished; we thought it had been He which should have redeemed Israel; and, behold, we have gathered at the festival of sorrow. What shall we say? for we had trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel. We hear the cry, He saved others, Himself he cannot save. We see men wagging their heads at Him; already His head has been bruised by the cruel thorn. We are taunted, we have nothing to say; we were His followers, and we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel. Give us patience to wait, and give us strength to drink this cup of bitterness. What is Thy world as we see it at present but a great feast of sorrow, a festival of bitter aloes? Behold, our souls are stricken with distress and misery. Thou dost drink of the cup first, and then Thou dost pass it round; now my turn, now his turn, now hers, now the child's; and the cup goes round till every throat swells because of that wash of poison. Hear us in our ignorance, stop not our wailing misery, for the very wailing does us good. Help us to wait to-day, and to-morrow, and the third day; then perhaps we may see the rising glory, the descending and eternal kingdom. Amen.

LXXVI.

THE CHRISTIAN IDEA OF DEATH.

PREACHED ON GOOD FRIDAY MORNING, APRIL 13TH, 1900.

"*To die is gain.*"—PHIL. i. 21.

THINK the text would read more strongly if we were to omit that intruded "is" in both cases. Let us delete this intrusive verb, and look at the text in this naked English: "For me to live — Christ, and to die — gain." That is nobler poetry, that is a better scansion of the poem. O Death, thy sting? Strike out the "where is." Grave, thy victory? It is a giant's taunt, and terrific and derisive challenge and rebuke. "To die." Why does man talk about death? He knows nothing concerning it but what he has been told or what he has seen; he goes wholly upon observation and report. Yet man thinks he is familiar with death and knows its secret. No living man knows what death is; do not speak of it, we do but show our ignorance, we cannot now rise to the height of that great argument. We say, looking at our dying friend and at those who watch the solemn scene, Poor man! I am sorry that he is about to sustain this great loss. We know nothing about it. We are sorry for his impending dissolution. That may be atheistic talk, a proud and ignorant vanity. Who dies? The living. They say it is sweet and easy to die; preparation can be made for dying, the bed can be tossed into softness, and applications can be made to the icy feet or the burning head; something can be done for the dying; but what can be done for the living, for the desolate one who has to be turned out of the room, so to say, where the great sacrament of death is administered? and what has he to go to but to an infinite darkness, an emptiness that cannot be described? He left the room—he left heaven. No

man has seen death except the dying man. That is an infinite comfort to those who think tenderly and solemnly about final catastrophes. We look on and see nothing but paleness, weakness, utterest exhaustion, and watch the panting, panting, panting breath. What do we know what the panting heart saw, what reminiscences it called up, what old familiar faces gathered in cloud outlines before the closing eyes? Who can tell? Let sanctified fancy, led and sustained by inspired revelation, lead the way, and see what it may of heaven in this dying which is gain. What made us take this high view of death? The death of Christ is the answer. That death explains all other death, enriches it with all manner of possibility. If Christ died, then . . . and after that "then" a whole heaven of dream and a whole Canaan of certainty may come.

A most curious mind is this of the Apostle Paul. He thinks aloud whilst he is apparently only writing with his hand or with the hand of another man. This is a monologue, this is the soul overheard, caught in its most secret and sacred whispers; what a privilege that we may hear the greatest soul that ever lived in the Christian Church talking! "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain": I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ—that is what I want, it is far better—nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you; I know that; I am in a strait betwixt the two; to die might be gain, not to me, a poor dying man, but to the cause. Some promote the cause by dying for it; it was so Christ lifted up His Cross, until its magnitude turned the firmament into a cloud, and its glory abashed the sun. We think our work is done when we die; probably in this matter, as in many other matters, we are quite wrong; it may be that by dying in harness, being brave to the last, and working the furrow only halfway through or wholly through, we are doing more by dying than we could do by living. Let our ignorance hold its breath, let our impiety dismiss its crude and often blasphemous dreams and anticipations, and let God have His own way in His own Church among His own people. It might be a cowardly thing to desire to die if by dying

we mean getting out of it, shaking it off, having nothing more to do with it, with its anxiety and its burdensomeness and its agony; that would be cowardice, and we should put Christ to a blushing shame if we talked so and yet professed to be the followers of His Cross. To die may be the greatest contribution we can make to the faith which we have endeavoured to express in words, and which now we must in one gigantic final effort endeavour to express in sacrifice.

The religion of Christ is a grand religion to die in. It is so fearless, it is familiar with the spirit of eternity; it has grown the soul into a reverent familiarity with things big as infinity and glorious as incarnated light. This is the sign of our growth, that the things which once affrighted us now exercise upon us all the subtle power and fascination of a charm or spiritual enchantment. Once we feared to look upon a dead body; in the England that I can remember the poor dead flesh was set in a dark room, with a few dim-lighted candles just to mitigate the darkness; and there were watchers, people who sat up all night near the dead or near the chamber where the dead were coffined; everything was in a sad, hopeless hush; few dare go near the dead. We have not so learned the Christ; the death-chamber has been turned into the centre of the house, the only bright spot in the whole habitation. What may we not learn from that image of triumph and that image of rest? That is the natural fruition of true faith in Christ, who "both died, and rose,"—as if the dying and the rising were part of the same act, hardly a pause between the going and the coming, the departing and the return. So the literature of experience has undergone a new punctuation. We breathe better than we used to breathe when we speak the music of the Word of God; we take more time, we take a deeper inspiration, and whilst we are deepening the inspiration, behold, the miracle is wrought, and the breath which we expected to expend in some threnody upon desolation and loneliness we spend on the All hail! and behold, we face the Christ we missed but for a moment. So it is in its own sense and way with our human fellowships and disfellowships, with

our comings and goings, with our wedding to-day and our desolation to-morrow; we must breathe better, with a deeper wisdom, with a firmer grasp of the facts and realities of human experience. Death is full of visions; we have caught some of them on the face immediately the last breath has been expended. If we had eyes to see, we should notice on that whitening face a trailing glory. The vulgar eyes cannot see it, the swine eyes of the field can look upon no such sight, but the radiant eyes of the soul, washed by the tears of grief and made beautiful by the expectancy of hope, can see even on the paling face where the glory was, outlined angels, in the last sacramental moment.

Christian death is full of brightness that living eyes cannot see, and full of hope that this poor, struggling, hesitating, self-contradicting experience of ours cannot adequately spell or interpret as one interprets who has the gift of telling what a dream is. We must be very careful therefore how we interpret the experience of those who die. Blessed are they that die in the Lord; for they rest, and their interpretation follows them, and we, too late, see meanings in things we did not understand and in actions which we were ignorantly inclined to resent. When we know all we shall forgive all and ask that all may be forgiven. There is not a wretch amongst those out of hell who has not some redeeming point. God can see it, Christ created it, the Holy Spirit will work upon it; and I know not what may take place between the here of time and the there of eternity. I repeat, therefore, that the Christian religion is an excellent religion to die with. It is hopeful, confident, poetical, expectant; it hears voices that the dull ears of the body cannot hear, and it sees sights hidden from the eyes of the flesh. The history of Christian dying would be the most thrilling history in literature. But it cannot be written, we can only see a verse or a chapter here and there, and from these broken fragments we may infer somewhat of the dignity and the restfulness and the triumph of dying in Christ. Weep for yourselves, do not weep for the Christian dying. It is quite right for you to weep, because you are still in the body, you are

still environed by the world, the flesh, and the devil, your nerves are exposed to rough winds and to touches that have no gentleness in them; cry, relieving your misery by the rivers of your grief, but do not grieve for those who have gone. They are not the authors of misery, they are the inspirers of wisdom and confidence and hope.

Some will say this would be delightful and most gratefully acceptable if it could be proved. I can prove every word of it, and will prove it now. There is no difficulty about the proof. If we have been thinking so, then we are worse infidels than we imagined. All this poesy, Christian reverie, and marvellous transcript of the soul can be established upon a rock of facts, and by the help of God I will so establish it in a few moments. The question which is imaginatively put to the preacher is this: How can you prove that the Christian religion is a great and sufficient religion to die in? My immediate, emphatic, final reply is: Because it is an excellent religion to live in. The life interprets the death. The life is the standard of everything. You want a basis of facts? You shall have it; in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, you shall have it, and you shall not leave this opportunity of seeing somewhat of the kingdom of heaven, saying that this matter has not been proved. You may tell lies, but not here; you cannot lie your way out of this great argument, the argument of life. What is it, then, that precedes and prepares for the great triumph, the triumph of Christian faith? The discipline of faith destroys the idea of its being a fancy. You have talked much about the reverie, but not a word about the discipline. That is where you get wrong, by looking at a hemisphere instead of looking at the total globe; you took the matter in parts and patches, and not as a grand and completed and reticulated mosaic composition, marvellous in its parts and in its combinations. What is this Christian discipline? I will tell you. I will ask you to admit this if you are logically inclined, though logic is often a lie: If the end which we can test is good, the end that we cannot yet test is likely to be good too. That ought to be perceived by the very slowest minds. To enjoy a

Christian death we must first live a Christian life. But will not a Christian life be all sunshine? Far from it. Is there not only one season in the year of Christian life, and is not that season summer? No, no; there is a fourfold season in the Christian life, and we must go through the whole process if we would reach the happy end. Is not this Christian life fanciful, sentimental, and indeed, quoth my lord, in his velvet slippers and on his hair hearthrug—is not this a little what we call superstitious? No, and I will prove it. You sitting there under your gilded ceiling, never having done a day's work in your life, never having divided a meal with a fellow-pilgrim, never having known the pinch of poverty and the desolation of orphanage, you sitting there and saying, Is not this a little superstitious?—why, sir, you are an insult to society, you are a blot upon the world of God. It is not for you to bear witness in this court, no counsel for plaintiff or for defendant has ever asked you to enter the witness-box and swear that you are about to tell either truth or lie; you are not wanted in this argument, you are out of it. What, then, is the argument from the Christian life of belief? How does the Christian life begin? It begins in repentance, and penitence is no superstition; when a man's heart is broken because of the wrong he has done, do not call it superstition. The man says, I have broken the commandments of God, I have broken human hearts, I have insulted holy memories; verily I have done the things I ought not to have done and I have left undone the things that I ought to have done; I know it, and I condemn myself, and I curse myself, and I dare not look up into the blue vault of heaven, for its very holiness of life would rebuke me and strike me dead; God be merciful unto me a sinner! Is that superstition? Will you gather up your warmed and coddled feet, and drink your reeking liquor and say, After all there may be a good deal of superstition in the Christian religion? Are you so far lost to sense of right and justice and historical reality and human experience as to tell that lie over again? Have you no knowledge of human misery, human tears, human broken-heartedness? Have you not been touched by your own son's return to his father's backdoor, because he dare not come in at the front door, crying in the cold chill of the night, "I

have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son" ? Take your pipe out of your mouth, and throw your liquor away, and go and tell the boy of your own blood and muscle that he is a little superstitious. You cannot; you will fling everything away that you may be able to get at him, and throw your arms around him, and reinstate him, and he shall be the dearer to you because of his penitent misery.

What after penitence ? Self-crucifixion. How long shall the self-crucifixion last ? For ever, throughout all earthly life, through the whole circle of the little for ever of time as we know it. Will not God forgive a man? Yes, but the man cannot forgive himself; that is where it is. The heart is still broken that you broke. But I have prayed to God and besought His forgiveness, and I think He has extended pardon to me. Not unless you first ask pardon of the broken heart; you cannot be serving the devil in one corner, and going and asking God's forgiveness in the other. It must be an out-and-out affair this, a thorough down-to-the-base-line affair; there must be no keeping back, a clean breast must be made of it, and the parties that have been injured must be told about the injury, and asked to exercise forgiveness upon you, the wretch of wretches, because you desolated a life and ruined a home. Is this a sort of superstition ? Dare you mock us by using that interdicted word ? We did the sin, we have told about the sin, we have kept back no part of the price, we have fallen flat dead down before the sinned against, and have said, Forgive us for God's sake and Christ's sake, and we will spend the rest of our days in trying to heal the wound we inflicted. Do not call that superstition, if you please, or you will hurt the heart of the whole world, and you will prove yourself unworthy to abide in a world which you have thus wounded by charging upon it hollowness, insincerity, and falsehood.

Well, then, suppose we have repented of our sins, and sought forgiveness through our Lord Jesus Christ; suppose we have seen our own unworthiness and have been penitent in consequence, and suppose that

we have utterly and absolutely received absolution from those we have wronged because we have first received it from the God we have dishonoured, does it rest there? No; we shall get all the superstition out of it presently; the rest of the forgiven life has to be spent in the devoted and unselfish service of other people. You thought it was reverie, you thought it was rhetorical transport, you even hinted that there might be a streak of sentimentality about it. We shall thrash that out of you before we have done; we have got you to confess your sin and your shame, and we have driven you to God in Christ for the pardon of your sin, and we have made the rest of your life an endeavour to repair the injury you have done; and now we say, Every man is your brother, and the lower he is the more gentle you must be to him; you must go out after that which was lost until you find it, you must think better of every other man than you have ever thought, and you must devote your life to the poor, and sit up all night with the lonely one who is in the last valley; and when he is gone you must take care of his children, you must see that they do not want; the case that you know not you must search out, you must be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, and hands to those that are helpless. Now, sir, say is this a religion to be flouted as sentimental and somewhat superstitious?

And I will add one more word—that you cannot do all these things of your own strength. This is not a mechanical arrangement, morality is not an attitude. We have lost our sense of the moral by our use of the remoter word, the ethical. We must get back to right, wrong, and not lose ourselves in new terms and ways and ideas and clouds. O hear me, angels of God, devils in hell, men upon the earth! This is not a religion to be taunted with being a transport, a reverie, or a dream.

I do not hesitate for a moment to give it as my opinion that what may be called the alarming style of preaching is most adapted to convert the impenitent. I do not mean gross and revolting descriptions of eternal torment, nor the carrying out into minute detail what may be called the material and corporal representations of the punishment of the wicked. This is offensive and disgusting, and generally defeats its own purpose, especially when done, as is often the case, in a harsh, cold, and unfeeling manner. What I mean by alarming preaching is an exhibition of the purity and unbending strictness of the law, together with such a method of applying this strict rule to the heart and conduct of the individual sinner as is calculated to awaken and startle his conscience; a faithful portraiture of the heinousness of sin, stripped of all the excuses which our deceitful nature is so skilful in framing for its defence; a careful discrimination between mere reformation and a renewed heart; the indispensable necessity of regeneration, and the absolute certainty that every man will perish who dies without it; a solemn manifestation of the immaculate holiness of God, and of His retributive justice in the punishment of the wicked; an impressive description of the solemnities of judgment, together with a chastened but awaking account of the torments of those who reject the sacrifice of Christ and refuse the offer of mercy. These are the subjects explained and enforced in suitable language, with close application to the heart, pungent appeals to the conscience, and with an affectionate, earnest, solemn manner, that are likely to arouse the careless and convert the sinner. I do not mean, of course, that we should make such topics the incessant subjects of our ministerial addresses. A perpetual denunciatory strain would at length render those for whom it was intended carelessly familiar with the terrors of the Lord. The timid would come at length to listen to the most appalling tempest without alarm if it always thundered. But what I mean is, that while a minister's habitual strain of preaching should be so discriminating as to leave no unconverted sinner at a loss with whom to class himself, whether with believers or unbelievers, it should not infrequently contain those allusions to, and descriptions of, the wrath of God, which, like the distant rumblings of the gathering and approaching storm, should drive men to the refuge provided by infinite mercy in the Cross of Christ. No one will flee for shelter who does not see a tempest at hand; and then only will the shelter be valued when the storm is believed to be coming. That this style of preaching has been the most useful could be easily proved by an appeal to the history of the Church.—*James.*

PRAYER.

BEHOLD is Thy hand wide open to us to-day, and Thou art as it were waiting to make our souls glad and enlarge the light of the morning. How good is God! and what wonder that men should say of Thee, God is love? for the victory is so overcoming, triumphant, that we have no memory of assault or danger or momentary overthrow. We bless Thee for these special mornings, these Eastertides, that come variously and when they will, not at our asking or bidding, but at Thy sending; may we say to Thee, Send more of them, for our hearts are often in the valley, and there is no fountain to give us water. Thou knowest our frame, Thou rememberest that we are dust; we are a wind that cometh for a little time, and then passeth away, and Thou art very merciful and pitiful, even so that mothers stand back and wonder at the tears of God. We thank Thee for all Thy love and care, we bless Thee for every Easter morning, we thank Thee for every bird that makes the morning glad with song. Thou hast done great things for us whereof we are glad; we knew it must come, from our reading of Thy wondrous Word, that some Man must arise to fight death and overthrow the monster. We were watching for His coming, we thought we heard His footsteps, far away there seemed to be some sound of a new footfall: for one said, Thou didst not leave my soul in hell, neither didst Thou suffer Thy holy one to see corruption; and another said, I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. We heard these voices, but we did not see the Deliverer, but in these latter days we have seen Him, within these handful of thousands of years we have beheld the victory over death. We are redeemed by His blood, we are inspired by His Spirit; Christ hath abolished death, Christ hath brought life and immortality to light in the Gospel. It is the religion of the morning star, the religion of new hopes, of dawnings, of coming things, of the beginning of the end and the end of the beginning: an infinite and blessed mystery. Thou hast brought us round to another Eastertime; so we get younger and younger by this revolution of the years, and presently we shall be where there is naught but youth, the oldest being the youngest and the youngest the oldest, and all ages lost in a great commonalty of rest and love. To some the year has

been a year of weariness ; some have nearly committed suicide through the pressure of despair—that chief of the fiends of hell ; and some have said, though they had the harp in hand, My feet had well-nigh slipped, I had nearly gone over the brink ; for I saw strange things, yea, as if life itself had been abandoned of God and wickedness were triumphant ; but I have come to the sanctuary-house to-day with my harp still in my hand, and it is in this house God will teach my fingers the way of music. And some have grown flowers all the year round ; if they could not grow them outside they have grown them inside, they have had the flowers ; the whole year, notwithstanding snowing and blowing of mad winter, has been a year of flowers and one continuous summer delight. We are all here before God to speak each in his own tongue, the tongue of his despair and sorrow and mystification, and prosperity and thankfulness, and we are but one Man, though many men, we represent one humanity, the humanity Thou didst shape into Thine own likeness as far as omnipotence could go. Oh the ruin of it, the black sin, the self-idolatry, the madness and the dance in the pit ! But Jesus is a name of redemption, recovery, restoration ; He creates us anew, creates us according to the infinite purpose of the Divine love. It is enough. Oh let the whole April sky shake out of its lap all the blessings we can hold ! and to-day we will bless Thee for the Saviour who died and rose and revived. Amen.

LXXVII.

EASTERTIDE.

PREACHED ON EASTER SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 15TH, 1900.

"*Christ both died, and rose.*"—ROMANS xiv. 9.

OW singular is the genius of man ! How odd is man wholly and all the year round ! What a half-mind he has ! He has no difficulty about that Christ died ; there he may be said to be almost orthodox : he is a poor creature who has no patches of piety about him. It is when we come to the "and rose" that man shows how little of a man he can be. Keep him to little things, and it is wonderful how big

he is upon his own scale; take him out into wider areas where the horizon is the fence that shuts in his own fields, and if you do not watch him with many tigers and wolves he will be an infidel; he seems to like that kind of luxury. Oh keep him to little things; let him have his Noah's ark and his toys and his bricks, and let him build them and throw them down and build them up again; and what a wonderful genius is man! But keep him away from the poetry, the ideality, and the divinity of "and rose." Because he never rose he thinks no one else could ever rise. He is just like a water-tank; every plumber knows that water cannot rise above its own level. So there is man, a believer and a denier. He is absolutely certain that Christ died; there he would accept a challenge to public discussion, he would be armed with Roman authors, historians, and poets, and he would delight to encounter the man who denied that Christ died; he has classic proof, he calls pagan witnesses. Now take him to the other court; he has neither law nor philosophy, he is weak as other men. Oh keep him in the lower court; away down, further down, and he can argue where nobody disputes; he is no chancery lawyer, he knows nothing of the black letter law of the Eternal. The Apostle Paul had no doubt about the resurrection of Christ; he says, "Christ both died, and rose." No question ever occurred to the early Christian mind as to any difficulty about the resurrection: the event was so new it would be like disputing the dew of the morning; there it was, the thing was immediately present; it was a new eye in the midst of things looking over all the cloud and through it, and testifying to a new and glorious power. Paul turned the resurrection of Jesus Christ into an argument, and into a poem, and into an inspiration. He lived on it, he risked the whole Christian fabric upon the resurrection:—"If Christ be not risen from the dead, then is our preaching vain," and that would be nothing; but "your faith is also vain," you are harbouring a dead trust, you are mocking your own soul.

Jesus Christ died on Friday and rose again on what we call the Sunday, and we have by the providence of God, ever good and large, gathered around an

empty tomb, and then around a risen Lord. It would be beautiful if in the hands of a true artist to compare the Friday and the Sunday. They belong to one another; the Sunday would not be half so bright but for the Friday. Your joy would not be so exquisite if there were not an historic background of tears and sorrow and speaking silence. That work was apparently well done on the Friday. That is what we call root-and-branch work. Why do the heathen rage? They are going to put an end to this sort of thing in Judæa and in all the world; they are going to stamp it out. Poor stampers! poor feet that stamp on such granite! The work, let us keep in view, of the Friday was well done; it would have required mechanical force to get any nail out. This was no work of trifling. Are you sure the arrangement is satisfactory as to this malefactor's crucifixion? Yes, we are quite certain. You speak hoarsely. We speak truly; every nail is fast to the wood, and the wood is no cedar; the whole thing is ready; we have caught this man at last, and we will stamp him out. That is better, I like that ascending inflexion. You are sure that it is all right? Quite right; before sunset he will be utterly dead. But may they not be making some arrangement of a kind that is open to suspicion? No, have you no fear about that; ha, ha! why, they have all forsaken him, and fled; all his friends have gone downhill; so there is no fear; this thing will in a few hours be stamped out. So far, so good. We have made an end of this business; we have stamped out a character, we have wrecked a claim, we have killed a bastard royalty; home! and let the wine be generous in quantity and quality. That was no lost Friday, that was no jerrywork, that was not done by men who wielded the hammer reluctantly and wanted to flee anywhere in order to play at football; this was workmanship, this was reality. That was Friday. We felt all along that this wonderful problem of Death (spell it with a large capital) had to be faced sooner or later; it was wearing out the patience of the world, it was mining the towers which men had built, it was blighting the generations that seemed to be just peeping up above the horizon line; at last men's hearts got weary; they did their best to turn old age into poetry, they wrote letters and essays

upon it; one of the most refined of the Romans wrote a book upon old age; they have watered that ivy very much, and they have dreamed dreams about it, and they have told the old man that he was looking younger than ever—so softly and tenderly do men lie when they want to beat off the ogre Despair that threatens a man's life and joy. Yea, and also long before these refined classic writers spake about old age there was a man who said, I know that my goel liveth; these boils are cruelly painful, my house is blown down and all my children are swept away, but I know that my redeemer liveth. He kept the fire as bright as he could on the altar of hope. Another said, Thou didst not leave my soul in hell, neither didst Thou suffer Thine holy one to see corruption. But the battle had not yet been fought; the world has always had a singing hope at its heart, a harp-playing power, a voice that could sing though it was often damped with tears, and there was sometimes in that thrilling voice a note of fatigue; still, it was there, and it kept the world alive.

Now there is some great fight being fought this Friday. They have nailed His hands, and they have nailed His feet, and they have pierced His side, and the environment seems to vindicate and justify their villany. It is all over; Job would withdraw his faith, and David would cease his song. Rest awhile, pause for a day or two; never hasten God; never try to force your own destiny; be great by being quiet. Now comes the day on which everything will be silent. It must be so, because this is the third day that the Malefactor Himself indicated. He was always so bold. He did not say, I will rise in three centuries, when you will all be dead and no man will be here who could charge Me with My own words; He said, On the third day I will rise again. It was a fair challenge, square, complete. When was Jesus timid, cowardly, uncertain? When did He, if not prevaricate, yet seem to handle words with such tricks of magic as to perplex and bewilder those who heard them? Never. He said before the Friday, The Friday is coming, my friends, I warn you of it; I go to Jerusalem to suffer many things of the scribes and the elders and of the chief priests, and I go to be

killed, and on the third day—— He knew that the hearts were breaking that loved Him, and that the third day was about as long as they could keep up at all even in solitude and secrecy and even under the apparent abandonment of their own faith in His personality and purpose. But on the third day they will give way. The soul can only hold on for a given time: if the next post but one does not bring that letter I shall die. "As it began to dawn toward the first day of the week." He did not keep them long waiting on that day, "it began to dawn"; it is not said that it fully dawned, it predawned, it sent forth itself in a kind of mimic dawning; it would require the eye of an expert look-out on one of life's ships to see that dawning. But it is always so in Christianity, it is always after its fullest noonday beginning to dawn; it never exhausts its hope, its trumpet has always another bold tune in it. It seems sometimes as if the faith were overthrown, but "it began to dawn toward"—there was a great silent wondrous onward movement. Enough! where God begins He continues, He completes. So there was that morning a hailing. Hail! It was one of the last words His own ears had heard but a few hours ago:—"Hail, King of the Jews! hail!" and He said, All hail! stop, stand still! this is a great day in Israel and in the world.

So we meet on resurrection morning. We know that Christ died, we may as certainly know that Christ rose. This is part of a great evolution, part of a great demonstration of Divine energy which no man can comprehend and which no man can arrest. We can do nothing against the truth, but God hath been pleased to permit us to do something for the truth. What can man do? He can kill every minister of truth, but he cannot kill the ministry. When will we look at the right points? Is the missionary dead? Yes, but missions are still going on, and nothing can hinder their advance. Is not that the blood of a head that has been clubbed to death by Rarotongan savages? Yes, that is the blood of the martyr of Erromanga. Is mission work therefore done? No, it is beginning to dawn toward—— You can kill the minister, but not the ministry. When

I was but a boy I was preaching in a little village, and whilst I was talking, I had no doubt with great energy and possibly with some incoherency, a drunken brawling man shouted, "We will stone you out of the town!" And I, at eighteen, said, "You can easily stone me out of the town, but you cannot stone the truth out of the town." You can kill the man, but not his work; you can crush the minister, but not the ministry; you can destroy the instrument, but not the music; you can cut off all the branches, but the root remains. Ay, but we can go down to the root too. Yes, to that root, but I am speaking about the root metaphysical, the Root of roots, the Thing, the Force, that cannot be got at, that no axe can find, and no digger can sink ground enough to discover the roots and all their fibres. So there is a root not to be touched, and out of that root there shall bud a stem more beautiful than flowers, more majestic than oaks and proudest cedars.

They did a great work on Friday. Oh no, no work at all. They secured their case certainly. Not at all; the wicked man secures nothing but his own destruction, and wickedness never triumphs except in its own overthrow. In the degree in which man, woman, child, cause, church, institution, is right, in that degree it is invulnerable; you can only confer upon it the opportunity of proving its own resurrection. It is well for us to know there are some things we cannot do. We cannot put down any really earnest, true, and divinely inspired ministry, whatever that ministry may be, in the pulpit, in the press, in the senate-house, in the family, or elsewhere. It is well, therefore, for us to know that there are some heights we cannot reach. Height is a religion. The best of us would not be half the man he is if there were no heights beyond his climbing, and if he did not know of the existence and reality of the heights, and pay them the tribute due to their unscaleable altitudes. There are some who want to do without religion. So be it; it is no business of mine to force religion upon anybody. In fact, if you wanted to do without the sky, well, so be it. Grow your flowers without the sky. Could we not grow flowers without the sky? Never. Could we not create flowers without the sky? Never; all flowers

come out of the sky. But can we not light lamps? Yes, but the lamps in all that makes them lamps come out of the sun, and the sun out of the bosom of God; and all things lie there, all these infant constellations lie in that all-feeding breast. You have tried to put down some good man probably. You will not succeed. You have demonstrated against some man. What became of your demonstration? Did anybody pick up the stick of that rocket? Not a boy on the earth cared to pick up such dirty cinders. It is therefore, let us say over and over again, something to know that there are some things we cannot do.

"Christ both died, and rose, and revived." That word "revived" comes in like a freshet into a channel that has been waiting for the rising of the river. All the channel has been so droughty, so barren, and all the land round about has suffered from it, but there is a freshet rising, and that freshet represents true revival, relifeing. And so Christ said before the Friday, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly," like wave on wave, billow chasing billow, until death was ashamed and overthrown, was lost, was swallowed up in victory. Why will not men remember that there are two very trying periods in the development of truth? There are periods of apparent stoppage. We call such periods dark ages; we say, It is no use any longer prosecuting this mission of truth; the people will not have it, the nations are dead, and it is whipping a dead horse to try to move this idea of ours into further action. There are therefore periods of stoppage in the development of truth. Then there are periods more trying still; I name them all under the one designation periods of transition, where the case is neither here nor there, definitely and finally, but it is both there and here, both here and there, both coming and going, advancing, receding, and men do not know where they are; they ask for the old landmarks, and the oldest inhabitant is dead, and there in no voice in the ear. The dear old Book is now in a period of transition, but it has come out of so many periods of transition that I am not giving myself a moment's heartache about the issue. It would never do for those who profess to have been

companying long with Christ themselves to get into a period of transition. What a ministry that would be! There must always be a ministry of advance, a ministry that throws the fighting line out fifty yards further ahead, or fifty miles. The leaders must not give way. Think of a man preaching who is in a period of transition! and he admires himself for being in that period, and treats himself to many a birthday cake because he is in a period of transition; and the people all get to know about it, and they get into great anxiety about it, and the man himself knows it, and he says this should be expected; he is now in a period of transition. Let him trance as much as he likes! I am in no period of transition if the question is, Is God love? Yes. Did Christ die and rise and revive? Yes. The transition, so far as I know anything about it, is in incidentals, accidentals, occasionals; but the steady, ascending, triumphant movement is in no state of transition, except it be transition to pass from the lower to the higher, from the human to the Divine, from earth to heaven; and that transition does not pule and whine, and seek pity, and go into occasional headaches that it may be bathed by gentle hands. That is not the transition that requires such poor nursing. Grow in grace, but whilst you are growing be strong. This is the case with Christianity. Jesus Christ is now discarded by many people. He is. I hear them putting the nails into His hands. I hear the splash as of red water; that is the puncturing of His side with the spear. They have left His Church. They will come back again. They say it is all superstition, and man is very glad of any plea that will exempt him from the discipline he dare not face. I want my young friends to stand fast in the Lord. It is not the business of every man to answer questions. There are questions which can only be answered by experts, but whether I love my mother is not one of them, and whether I love my Saviour is not a question which some expert can answer. I must answer it myself.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, may we know our limits, and abide within them as within a habitation planned and roofed by Thyself. May we know how frail we are, may we not exaggerate ourselves and thus forget God, may we remember that it is the Lord that reigneth, and that His throne is set upon pillars that are built on the rock. Keep us within our right as Thou hast defined it; may we leave behind us the things that are forbidden, or if we touch them may we be so filled with Thy grace as to be able to defy their seductiveness. Thou hast put us in a strange garden, and Thou hast hedged us in, and every leaf is a watching eye, and all things are known to Thyself. We are so forgetful; we think we planted the garden, and set the hedge, and that we can do what we like with the green leaves, so foolish are we and ignorant; we do not see the red flame of the sword, nor do we see the movement of the cherubim and the seraphim. We live on the dust; we build ourselves streets, and call them beautiful; we think not of Thy sky star-lighted and a great height that may not be touched; so we grope and stumble into the grave. Oh that we knew that Thy throne is established in the heavens! If we could but know that all things are settled and ordered and sure, and that we have nothing to do with them but to obey and to aspire and to pray, to love and to serve, to suffer and to triumph in Christ! We need these teachings every week, everywhere, specially in the city that is the greatest disturbance in our lives. We bless Thee for a quiet hour, for a shelter inviolate; we thank Thee for a refuge and a sanctuary in which the Lord Jesus is, with all His wounds, with all the mystery of His priesthood, with all His offers of grace and all His infinite solaces and delights. May we meet Him in His own appointed place, and tarry till we forget the time! Amen.

LXXVIII.

THE BOASTING AXE.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, APRIL 19TH, 1900.

"Shall the ax boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood."—ISAIAH x. 15.

S this a Divine interruption? Has the previous speaker talked too much and made an utter fool and atheist of himself? Who had been talking? The king of Assyria. Who interrupted him? The Lord: "I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks." What had the stout heart of the king of Assyria been saying—anything modern, by anticipation? Let us hear: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man: And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped." It was time someone interrupted a monologue so swollen, so tumid, so utterly blasphemous and diseased. The meaning of the text is always in the context; the context is the best commentary upon any text. Whatever you younger preachers do, never fail to read and carefully study the context. Here you have a proud Assyrian thinking that he has done everything, offering incense to himself, building an altar to his own glory and his own fame; and he is broken-in upon and thrown down, and there he lies in the dust of contempt. "I will stain the pride of all glory." That is the declaration

of the Lord. We have the same thought in the New Testament; for the Testaments are one in all their great moral distinctions and all their great lines of moral movement. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." If any man think he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing as he ought to know it. Be humble under the hand of God, thus making prayer of the meanest petition, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

How many ways are there in which this text could be applied? To God, to man, to society, to destiny. This great pregnant inquiry seems to hold within itself all solemn questions, and to answer them one by one with appropriate dignity and with efficient energy. What say you? Shall we gather under it? we may find ourselves in an asylum, lighted by the sun, whose air is full of the peace of God.

"Shall the ax boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnity itself against him that shaketh it?" Is there not a philosophy of things and a subtle poetry, an obvious and self-vindicating fitness? Is there not a place for every one? is every one in that place? Does the saw ever mistake itself for the sawyer? and does the rod ever spring up and say, I am no wood, I am as good flesh as you are? Is the whole universe, so far as we know it, an adventure, an empiricism, a happy-go-lucky construction, no man knowing which shall be up and which shall be down? Is it a system of confusion, whose only sun is the midnight? or is everything planned, designed, fitted into its own proper place? And what would be the issue if we accepted, not nominally but with all our heart and soul, the sovereignty of God? The acceptance of the Divine sovereignty would make all things new: no more war, no more clamour, uproar and tumult forgotten, and sorrow and sighing would flee away. But we won't. Every man is God, and not the less so that he shudderingly denies the statement. But we believe a good many things we do not formulate; we are cunning enough to drop the use of words when such use might bring us under severe stricture and encroach upon our means of obtaining a liveli-

hood,—that odd creature man is not without a certain degree of self-reserve and cunning. What would be the result if we accepted the glorious doctrine of the sovereignty of God? The first result would be great personal peace. Do you know what a murder would be committed if we accepted the sovereignty of God? So far as we are concerned, the devil would be killed; there would be no more devil, envy, jealousy, and clamour and evilspeaking and backbiting all would die as by a lightning-stroke. Then what would society do? If we could not find some fault with the sermon or with the speaker of the sermon, why go to church? Then we could not backbite one another just a little; the salt would have lost its savour so far as social intercourse is concerned. And all envy, restlessness, petty ambition, selfish aspiration, mean calculation would be blown out of the way as by a great wind from heaven. But we won't accept the sovereignty of God that would rule all things into peace and unity and music. If I could accept the sovereignty of God really and truly I should know my limitations and not find fault with them. The mischief is, not that we are unaware of our limitations, but that having found them we bruise ourselves in futile endeavours to enlarge them. Now, do what the saw may, it never can be the man that wields it. If the saw could know that really and truly it might do great and useful work, and never have a dream of trouble. I must accept the sovereignty of my Father, and thus get rid of a great many ambitions, self-exaggerations, and assurances never spoken, that I may be better than you are. A man would not say so for the world; no, this odd creature man is really not destitute of cunning. He can denounce most when he praises most; he can be most bitter when he is most sweet; yes, he is cunning. The magistrate cannot always catch him; he is a poor thief that can be caught.

What would be the result if we had amongst us through and through a most hearty and loyal and loving reception of the great doctrine of Divine sovereignty, the great doctrine that all things are settled and decreed and arranged? In that doctrine I do believe with my whole soul, though I have had in a

sense to pay my soul as the price of its own faith. The second result we should have would be great social harmony. That is the great solution of all our social squabbles. Many have sought to handle society by means of programmes. Society is never to be efficiently and redeemingly handled in that way. But man must have some holiday; if he were always working and praying might not life to some kinds of temperament be rather dull and melancholy? So man will now and again take to programme-making, and his great scheme is to persuade the saw that he is as good as the sawyer, and the saw is willing to believe him. Where you have willingness to believe, progress, at least nominal and superficial progress, is easy. Accept the sovereignty of God; accept the great doctrine of personal, daily beneficent providence, and all your social troubles are at an end. This is the Bible method, and the Bible is one of the oldest of the books. We have amongst us a kind of thing called pantheism which is distributing its aphorisms and apophthegms without knowing that they were all distributed in India two thousand five hundred years ago. It would be a pity to know that, because it would be bad for trade. You can never get rid of the saw and the sawyer, the axe and the hewer, the clay and the potter. You must always have in society the great man, and the little man, and each in his own place may be equal in importance to the other. Mark the definition; everything depends upon the definition: each in his own place. But you cannot get rid of the classification of men; you cannot write men up; it would never be possible for any number of men to lift any little man so high up as to make a great man of him. Great men are not made; they come up from the Eternal. They cannot explain themselves; they are mysteries to their own consciousness; in the degree in which they are truly great and noble are they truly great in humility and gentleness and beneficence. The giant talks less than the dwarf. You can never get rid of the superior, and the inferior. It is no use saying that they are of equal value. I know that the man with whom I am conversing is a thousand times my size; I do not need to be told to fall down before him in lawful homage, I do it instinctively,—Hail, king! When we lose the spirit of social reverence, I do not care how

much uproar we have, for uproar can never make up for the absence of the music we have banished. But it is no shame to be less than some other man. The man who has more than I have has more responsibility, more will be expected of him, a heavier bill will be brought in for his discharge. So must we all think of the various distributions and classifications made by the sovereignty of God; and the man who has five talents, the man who has two talents, and the man who has one talent must all get together and see what is the best thing to be done, how individuality can flow into harmony or union, and how union can fall back upon individuality with cheer and appreciation and inspiring courage. You cannot get rid of the leader and the follower; these things are not of our invention. We think that we made so-and-so leader. Quite a delusion. God is behind everything, around everything, and above everything, and it is God that worketh in you. You may contravene Him, you may disobey Him, you may for a moment thwart His plans and violate His idea of social architecture: still remains true the gracious saying, The Lord buildeth all things, and the city is unwatched that is neglected by His hands.

If we could really believe these elementary truths we should have a great unit in society. Man did not make society, and man cannot destroy it; man did not make mystery, and man cannot solve it, unless by God's enlightenment and special permission. The scientific man has told us that an atom of iron may be a more complicated system than any that can be found in the stars. Of course it is difficult for us to understand this, but the man of science does not ask us to understand it, and he does not care whether we understand it or not; for the man of science several days in the week has a very real contempt for the other man. It is not whether we will accept these things or not, we are bounded by these limitations; what we have to do is to accept the situation, to say, The Lord reigneth; He did not make me to speak or to sing or to paint or to write immortal verse, but He made me thus, and so, and set me in this corner to do the best I can under His blessing: enough! Is there not a way of enlarging an environment?

Certainly; there are two ways. The first way is the break-down way, utterly defying and despising it, and getting it out of the road by taking a short cut. The second way is to work within the environment so lovingly, patiently, and self-disregardingly, that God will come to us one day, and say, Son, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. That is legitimate promotion, elevation, enthronement. Never take to the rough and atheistic plan; it always ends in darkness and disappointment; but let me humbly wait where I am, and when the Lord sees that I can do a little more than I am doing now He will say to me, Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. That is the great law of true expansion and true liberation.

Out of this acceptance of the Divine sovereignty comes a grand religious brotherhood, as well as a deep satisfaction and noble peace. God did it all. Here is a man talking that has really a fresh-air talk, a south-west wind the blowing of which brings gospels with it. Saith he: God did it, God does everything in love, God does all things; there is not a blade of grass in all the acreage of the globe that does not owe its individuality to God; the great God taketh care of the fowls of the air, He knows their names, He knows their wings, He calls some of the wings pinions that can carry the eagle away until the rock becomes a speck; and some of the wings are but pulses, little bits of sunshine, little blobs, but wondrous little creatures they are, who make the best of their way through the air with such poor instruments. You have seen the blackbird listen for his worm; the blackbird does not see the worm, he listens for it. If we listened we might hear God. I often watch my neighbourly blackbird, and I love to see him turn the worm into a song. That is a surprising resurrection. God has placed me in a lower place than another man, and sometimes the devil says to me, You are just as good as he is—throw a stone at him; you are just as good as he is—write an anonymous letter about him. The devil says, What business has he to be up there, and you to be down here?—heave a half-brick at him.

Poor devil! he never had a noble conception, a grand idea; he is a liar from the beginning and a murderer.

Now we must have a sceptre, a throne, a king. We as Christian students and believers have accepted the idea that God reigns, and by God we mean the loving, personal, redeeming God, the God incarnate in Christ Jesus, the God of Bethlehem, of Calvary, and of Olivet; the priest God, who loved us, who gave His Son to save us. That is what we believe; and, believing that, out of it comes a whole philosophy of daily life, of social responsibility, and of all manner of well-regulated and harmonic action. Now which is the greater—for we must have great and small; these distinctions are not of our own making—which is the greater, I will ask you, the man who wrote the book—being Paradise Lost or Homer's Iliad—the man who wrote the book or the man who bound it? I wonder if you could constitute yourselves into a committee and appoint a sub-committee in order to return an answer to that inquiry? Which had the greater mind, judging both men from the evidence that is accessible? The one man wrote the book, the other man bound it; the book has achieved universal and imperishable fame, and the bookbinder has—been paid. Which is the greater? oh, tell me! the picture or the frame-maker? If I could invite you to a grand exhibition of all the paintings of the year, and if I could also ask you to attend a complete exhibition of all the frames that have been made during the year, to which exhibition would you go? But is not one man as good as another? Why not go and see the frames? they are all gilt, and they are all shapely, and they are all made by very expert and efficient workmen; now will you go to see the pictures or the frames? I need not wait more than one moment; you have answered before the question was put. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. You want the pictures, the genius, the flame pentecostal, the mystery of harmony, perspective, colour, the silent oratorio.

And so we can carry the matter into a higher level,

and say, Which is the greater, the father or the child in arms? Who will answer questions regarding the house, regarding its sale, its occupation, its decoration, its management, the father or the child in arms? Whom would you consult, the expert or the layman? There are experts in all trades, occupations, businesses, and professions, and there are men who know nothing about these occupations and professions, and they are appropriately called laymen. Now if you were really ill would you send for the physician or the blacksmith? You are a socialist, and you say one man is as good as another. It is folly, falsehood. Why, there was a trial some time ago about some postage-stamps, and there was only one man in the world could settle the case. And yet one man is as good as another! The expert was called in, and he held up the sheet and applied his lenses, and read the mystery which the lay eye could not see, and then he said, This is genuine. There was no appeal. Could I not have done that? One postage-stamp is the same as another to me, but this man is an expert, and judge and jury could say nothing against his decision. And one of her Majesty's justices told me the other day that it is perfectly possible to distinguish one kind of stitching from another. Who did this stitching, the woman A, or the woman B, or the woman C? There is a signature of stitching; that signature can be discovered and verified; no other woman would do this stitching exactly as the stitcher herself did it. And yet to you and me all stitches seem to be much about the same. But there is a distinction in everything, there is a signature all through and through. They are prosecuting some poor people, I see, who think they can read the lines upon the human hand. Let them read them. I do not want them read, and I do not believe in their palmistry, but if that is just as far as they have got, why find fault with them, why stop them? If a man has a dream, let him tell it. I may not have time to listen to it, but I would leave him all the space there is to tell the dream in. And that is the only way to put down bad preaching. Do not put it down by thumbscrews and by axes and blocks, but come and say to the man, Now what is your thought, let us hear it, you shall have time and opportunity, tell it.

And in many cases you will find the heretic will talk himself back into faith. Never expel the heretic; you magnify him and you make a martyr of him; but take as much faith as he has and work upon that, and by magnanimity and nobleness and charity endeavour to win the man's confidence, and mayhap he who for a moment was a heretic may for the rest of his life be an apostle of the faith.

Then let us beware of second causes in providence, let us beware of second causes in religion, and let us beware of second causes in destiny; and let us accept the old, old doctrine of the sovereignty of God, and when we are in darkness let us seek the altar, the Cross, and pray. How long? Till the light comes. All night Aquinas knelt alone; why should I be outdone by his saintly patience? I too will wait, wait, wait upon God, and I will say, Feed my heart. After many days He will find me still praying. Still? Not attacking another thing until I have got the answer to this importunate, earnest prayer. Go to, men, women, children, preachers, hearers, go to; for God waits, and if we wait upon Him we shall grow, not towards old age, but towards youth and immortality.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, do Thou pity us and visit us with Thy salvation, and give us continual assurance that Thou art near us; otherwise we shall faint and be as dead men on the ground. We can only live in Thy Spirit; our time is worthless but for Thine own eternity; take up our handful of days into Thine eternity, and bathe them with the glory thereof, that we may be no longer as those who grope in darkness and inquire of one another in the twilight. We would walk in noonday, our whole lives would be bathed in the summer sun of Thy love. Oh that we knew our calling in Christ! Oh that we might be no longer slothful and sluggish servants, but alert and wise, full of wakefulness, answering every sign in Thy condescending heaven, and showing how ready we are by the power of Thy grace to run the way of Thy commandments. Oh that we had hearkened unto Thee long ago! by this time we had been men stalwart and giantlike, and none could have stood before us because of the indwelling of our God. But we have compromised and made truces, and we have endeavoured to work with both hands; we have looked unto the heavens, and then we have looked unto the earth, and we have wondered whether we could manage our own lives by a poor, mean, shallow cunning in which there is no divinity. Then again we have repented and fallen upon our knees and cried unto God at the foot of the Cross, if haply after all we might become men, strong men, valiant, the whole life a ringing anthem, the whole breath a tender hymn. We have heard of Thy kingdom and of its coming, and we have heard of great voices being lifted up in heaven to proclaim the descending and ascending sovereignty of Thy Son. We believe it, we live in it, our souls take fire again at this holy torch, and behold we stand fronting the world, the flesh, and the devil armed with all the sufficiency of God. We pray Thee to waken up Thy Church, poor, dead, sluggish, slumbering Church, having ten talents and using only one. Oh that Thou wouldst revive us, bring back to us the old vitality and the infinite passion and the real consecration! We long for that day; sweep out of the way whom Thou wilt, only let that day come; and the earth shall know when the summer sun is at the zenith. Amen.

LXXIX.

SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 22ND, 1900.

"*Ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*"—MATTHEW xvi. 3.

HOW wonderful is this half-growth of man! You think if he can know so much, it would be quite easy for him to turn over the page and to read the longer words. But it is not. There seems to be an almost arbitrary stopping-place in growth, whether it be growth of the body or of the mind or of business; the question applies to all the directions and evolutions of life. You can get so far, how does it come that you cannot get further? One thing is meant to lead to another; where we end we should begin. We should only finish the Bible in order to begin the revelation. Men may be clever in one direction, and all but fools in another. It does not follow that because a man is a good judge of a horse that therefore he ought to give you an opinion about your destiny as a man. This puzzled and perplexed the Son of God; for said He, How is it that you can go so far and stop dead there? You say about a boy, He is going to be extremely clever. I am not so sure of that; I have known very clever boys stop short and become quite ordinary without there being any apparent reason for the stoppage. I have known quite ordinary and commonplace boys suddenly develop and become wise and strong, full of virtue, full of life, insomuch that people have said, Surely this is the boy we knew some ten years ago, and then he was so dull and almost stupid; he seemed not to have a word to say for himself, but to retire into some congenial shadow. How is this? We have prophesied of some boys that they would become the chiefs and leaders

of their day, and behold, they have dropped off into commonplace and obscurity, halting there for a moment on their way to oblivion. How is it that a man can be so clever in one direction, and be utterly useless in another? That this is so is written upon the broad sheet of daily life; there is no questioning of it, it is a fact, and a pregnant fact, and we ought to apply that fact as a standard in measuring our own abilities, our own vocation, and our own responsibilities to society.

Jesus Christ found that He was in the midst of a number of weatherwise people; they were quite experts in the reading of the cloudy signs, they knew what the weather would be to-day and perhaps to-morrow, and they published their forecasts of the weather; but when it came to higher reading, reading on another level, they were as moles and bats from whom the genius of daylight penetration had been withheld. Do we make one another up? do we hold varied trusteeships? and are they brought under one grand obligation, so that we may, thus supplementing one another, constitute a great social unit? Are there not really readers of the clouds and readers of the unseen? could they not meet now and then in common counsel to see how things stand and what the general outlook is? They must not despise one another; for one man can do this, and another man can do that, and neither man can do both. So that we are mutual trustees, we supplement each other; if we could enter into the spirit of this arrangement, we should have brotherhood, free, frank interchange of opinion, and work together in a great and beneficent association. Some things are common to us all, and at points hardly calculable we break off from the common holding, and each becomes a freeholder by himself and in himself, as it were directly holding the land of his genius and power from the great Creator. Strange as it may appear, there are some things that belong to us all, things in which we have a common right. We do not understand this. Every man thinks that surely he has a right to smoke in the open air. Now that is the only place where he has no right to smoke; because the air belongs to

the little child, and the old man, and the sick, and the feeble; it is the great benediction belonging to us all, and no man has a right to spoil it. Who would have thought of this? The thing is absolutely preposterous on the face of it, says the man who thinks about nothing but himself, and is content with that small subject. There are things that belong to us all,—the great sunshine. O poor unwashed hands of the child, put yourselves out into this great bath of light and glory, and enjoy yourselves in this great gift of day. Blessed be God, no man can build high enough to build out the sunshine. Man in some forms and phases has built a good deal. One gang of men undertook to build a tower which should reach unto heaven: I have not heard of its having put on the copestone. Heaven will not be too nearly approached by any of your building. And to-day, vernal day, day of violets and sweet flowers, goes so to say all over the earth, saying, to-day as every day, Come out into the light, and enjoy yourselves with a wise dance and the holy sacrament of thankfulness.

But whilst we recognise these great common gifts, we recognise also a partition of ability, so that one man is an expert along line A, and another man is an expert along line B, and each must work out his own vocation. As there are great commonwealth blessings of nature, so there are great republican blessings in moral and spiritual regions. God did not intend any man to be born a slave. Liberty belongs to every responsible creature; his responsibility will limit and define his liberty, and thus give him the very best of it. Liberty that wantons itself into licence really conducts itself into the worst bondage. Regulated liberty is freedom. God means every soul in this sense to be free. God did not intend any man to be born into hatred, either to hate or to be hated; God meant us all to be the great children of His great love. Love is not confined to this place or to that; there is love in the very darkest parts of the city. Love is not bidden or commanded to come into the heart; love is there natally, originally, and wants only to be awakened; and hands—poor hands and arms on which there is no fatness or signature of

prosperity—are put out in the dark to find the child to hug. There are common instincts, common privileges. And yet singular to say, and yet necessary to say, there are limitations which are round about the individual, so that he has his talent, his two talents, his five talents, himself not to be numbered with other men in certain great generalities. The individuality of the soul is never lost; it is never drowned in the river of mean compromises; it should stand forth individual and yet associated; a great personality, yet part of a greater humanity. To combine the whole and the part, the great universal gift and the special endowment: this is the problem, and Christianity alone sufficiently and finally solves it.

We make great limitations of our own; we ought to know something about this problem of definition or boundary. We are quite learned in frontiers, in social and moral as well as natural geography. How is it, saith the Spirit of Christ, that you are so expert in definitions and limitations, and rights and wrongs, in all lower things, and can ye not discern the higher limitations which often mean the higher and wider opportunities? We have a great law of trespass; on the matter of trespass we are quite experts. We go to the expense of printing or otherwise inscribing boards two feet by eighteen inches declaring that no trespass is permitted in these fields—"By Order." Has a board like that been put up by order? Yes. How is it that ye can print and paint these little boards guarding a few handfuls of sod from trespass, and can ye not see that in the wider moral regions there is a great sovereign law of trespass, a warning that whosoever violates this or that boundary a serpent shall bite him, or his own conscience shall torment him as with the lash and sting of living thongs? How is it that we can be so clear upon the protection of our property from trespass, and yet we leave all the gates of the soul open, so that as many devils as like may come in and make a playground of our hearts? Wise along one line, fools along another! A man who would be irritated by the fact that some half a dozen little boys had climbed over his five-barred gate and stolen a few crabapples from his plantation would be astounded if he were told by some preaching man

that possibly he had left his whole soul open to temptation, seduction, suggestion, and that thieves of a spiritual kind have robbed the orchard of his heart. How is it?—my Lord crucified, how is it?

We have a very stringent law against forgery. Of course all decent people tremble at the very word; and yet—my Lord, how is it?—these same people will take any number of forgeries along the line of faith, spirituality, deception, cunningly devised fables whereby the devil violates the sanctuary of the soul and befouls the fair half of a redeemed world. What a fuss men make when their names are forged; how they run hither and thither to rectify it; in what wild amaze they look out if haply they can detect the man who forged a signature. All that is right; within its own limits it is perfectly right; no wise man attempts to dispute it; but why be so very alert upon the matter of forging a signature, and yet allow yourselves to be set down in the national statistics as what you are not? Why not be consistent? why not be as eager-minded at one part of the great question as at another? How is it that ye can read the signs of the weather but cannot read the signs that are written in the inner air, the mystic signs, the dreams that tell of the greater realities? The law says we must not vitiate the air. What a fussy law it is! and it can only be by some Act of Parliament that the air is kept from certain kinds of vitiation. Your neighbour cannot do just what he likes on his own property because he may create a nuisance whereby your property would be prejudiced. O ye hypocrites! saith Christ, how is it that you are so anxious about the air that is natural and so careless about the moral atmosphere? Any drunken, disgraceful being can befoul it with oaths. You who would not permit a brick chimney to be built within a certain number of feet of your front window, you have nothing to say to the people who are blackening the air with blasphemy and soiling the summer with vile words. Some of you go into little parliaments and great on the question of sanitary regulations. They say, Vote for A, and sanitation! How is it that you vote for the amendment of drains, and take no interest in the destruction and afterward the reconstruction of the foulest of

sewers, the human heart? Have you no province there? Tell God so; do not beat my poor cheek with such foolish observations. What, have you no influence upon the higher sanitation? Can you not by speech or example show what a foul thing it is to have a cathedral built by men who blaspheme one part of the day and drink themselves into stupidity on the other? This applies to all work, to all engagements, professions, and responsibilities of every kind. The great point of the argument is exactly the point of the text, that men are great in the weather, but in nothing else; great judges of the external, and no judges at all of the internal and spiritual; foolish men who think that by adding a few inches to the width of a wall they can build out the cholera and also build out the angels. Why not be consistent all round? Why not aim at least to be as eager on moral and religious questions as on questions of mere politics and mere social economies and arrangements?

By the text we are entitled to enlarge what we can see into what we cannot see except by the vision of the soul. Here is a great lesson in inductive reasoning. Because such and such is the direction of the wind and such and such are the indications of the clouds, therefore we shall have such and such weather. Quite right; I do not oppose your forecasts; but why not carry up the idea, and endeavour to reason concerning the things you see with the eyes of the heart in the spiritual realm, and draw your inductions according to the great basis of fact, phenomena, and experience available to every student who faithfully and humbly and lovingly endeavours to discover the will of God? There is a spiritual barometer, there is a spiritual thermometer; there are many ways appointed and therefore approved of God by which we can put this and that together and draw wide inferences from great spiritual premisses. If we had eyes to see we should know that from the beginning God has a certain purpose and will surely accomplish it. That purpose is a purpose of beneficence. Jesus Christ says the fields are already white unto the harvest; Jesus Christ reasons from the lilies and from the fowls of the air to the great paternal providence of God over every soul of man. It is not everyone who can get

the oak out of the acorn. You cannot get it out with a clasp knife; you may not take a pair of garden shears and cut the oak out of the acorn: none of our little cutting, if you please, none of our mischief-making, no taking to pieces the organ to see where the music comes from, no vivisection of the poor shrinking human heart to know where are the springs and by what issue it finds its way out into the world. There is a way by which we can find the oak in the acorn; we must so to say marry the acorn to the sun, to the earth, to the great chymistry of nature, and then we must simply but hopefully wait. It is often the waiting that kills; the fighting is a holiday, the waiting is slow murder.

Yet we must observe the line of limitation even here. We must not imagine that we can see things which are forbidden. There is no meaner trade than fortune-telling; yet there is not a man in London that would not succumb to it under certain circumstances. I know that many will rebel against this sentiment, and therefore I am quite sure that I am right in advancing it. You have to get the proper bribe gathered, then my lord Haughty will succumb, but it must be under certain circumstances: because his respectability must be protected, and his signature at the bank must still be valid. Now if considering these things you can arrange a little movement by which he can have his fortune forecast, especially if you can say to him that almost presently his ship will arrive with a hundred thousand pounds, and that almost before he can turn round the world—dead, stupid world hitherto—will recognise his greatness and send him to the Upper House direct, he might smile at the forecast, but deep down in his heart he says he would not wonder if there is something in it! How can such a world be redeemed? It may take countless millenniums to effect the redemption of such a world.

We must recognise the fact that there is a difference in sight. We recognise this in the sight of the bodily eyes; why not recognise it in the inner and truer sight of the soul? Can you read a placard fifty yards off? Your answer is, I certainly cannot do so. Are you entitled from that consciousness to declare that

there is not a man in the world that can read it? You have to admit that there is sight longer than yours. Can you read the Bible without lenses, glasses, or mechanical aids of any kind? You may possibly reply, Certainly I cannot do so. Does it therefore follow that no other man can read it without such aids? In a moment you say that to make any such contention would be simply absurd. That is right: why not apply that fact to a higher level, and find for it a broader and deeper interpretation? As a matter of fact some men can pray with great fluency and comprehensiveness, and other men cannot; some men can write books, and other men cannot; some men are prophets who can see afar, and others never had a dream in either eye. Why not admit this, and then apply it to the lives and ministries of all the great men in the Bible who have under Divine inspiration interpreted to the world the will of God? You cannot read a letter from your own child without saying, "Where are my spectacles? I cannot read this: anybody seen my spectacles?" and your own companion will say, "Give it to me, I will read it for you." Which of you is right? or is there any real difference between you as to merely physical gifts? But when you come to the interpretation of moral and spiritual truths, then the prophet makes himself felt; he says, I will interpret the will of God by the power of God that is upon me and within me. For no prophet speaks out of his own wisdom, he speaks according to the inspiration of the soul by the God whom we recognise and adore as the Holy Ghost. We must therefore listen to the higher voices. We are at liberty to test the spirits whether they are of God; that may often be a bounden duty which we cannot shirk under any plea or pretext. Yet there remains the great fact that we have a book which is filled with holy messages from the holy God, and these have been so often confirmed that their very confirmation becomes not only an argument but a starting-point of the most profound and elaborate reasoning. If any man has read the Book of Genesis aright he knows that there is a book coming that shall be full of anthem, song, and triumph; for the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. He read that in the very

first verse of the Bible if he was a prophet when he read that opening verse. There is a great philosophy of implication; one thing means another, points to another, and gives assurance of another. Nothing ends in itself. Created is a word that does not end in creation. Created is a polysyllable, a literature, a grand theology. When God created He meant that not a hair should be uncounted, not a sparrow fall without the Father.

I am not ashamed to say that, having just passed the threescore years and ten, I am still an Evangelical believer. If this were my last testimony as a public preacher of the Kingdom of God, I would declare that the Evangelical faith, as learnedly and experimentally interpreted and practically applied, answers more questions, solves more problems, settles more difficulties, and opens up vaster vistas to the religious imagination than any faith or any theory ever submitted to the confidence of mankind. We want more definite assertion of definite principles. I do not believe in narrow dogmas, in literal imprisonment; I believe in the great bed-rock of truth, and over it the great sky of religious imagination and spiritual interpretation. I believe that all life is a great problem and a great parable, and I am sure that there come times in the history of the soul when nothing but the Cross—deride it who may—can touch the agony of our life. Believe a man who has seen a great deal of human experience, a man who has known difficulty and strenuous effort, and unrelenting and unrelaxing devotion to what he believes to be true. I have been a man of war from my youth; I have feared the face of no man. I have believed my cause to be righteous. I may have spoken unadvisedly; I may, on the spur of the moment, have selected words which I would not in calmer leisure have selected; but I will say this: that nothing but the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ can follow a man all day and all night, up the hill and through the valley—nothing will stand by him in such steadfast purpose and friendship as the love of God as seen in Christ Jesus the Lord. I tell the generation of preachers yet to come, if my words should be preserved for their attention, that they can preach all their little theories and read all their elaborate and soulless essays; they can be as literary and ingenious and even poetical as they please, but if the Cross be not the staple of their ministry, their congregations will turn away as hunger turns away when stones are offered it instead of bread.

[*Extract from speech delivered by Dr. Parker at the re-opening of Paddington Chapel, April 24th,* 1900.]

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, how long have we to live? Is there not an appointed time to men upon the earth? Is not the grave of the strongest man already dug? We know not what Thou dost do in the night time. We cannot tell how near the rising of the tide is; we have our poor geographies and calculations, but no man may take his pencil and paper into Thy kingdom and add up the movements and totals of things. Thou leadest men by a way that they know not, yea, the blind by paths in which they need not stumble: would that we had faith enough to trust ourselves entirely to Thy care and Thy keeping, so that we have no thought of our own concerning a day so near as even to-morrow! May we live short lives, and therefore happy ones and useful; may we receive the seal of Thy love every morning and hold it as a sacred trust until the time of the coming of the evening star; then may we lay ourselves down in peace and in safety, knowing that it is the eye of the Lord that watches through all the hours of darkness. One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet; another dieth in the bitterness of his soul and never eateth with pleasure; some are subject to bondage through a lifetime in fear of death. Such is the life we lead, a wondrous troubled, joyous life, full of starvation and festival, despair and hope, a living daily terrible self-contradiction. Blessed are they who hide their handful of years in the years that are at the right hand of the Almighty; may we bring our time to rest its fevered self in the coolness and the calm of the divine eternity. Oh that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider their latter end, that they would be no longer fools, but wise men bent on wise journeys, so that at the end they may glorify God, magnifying His name with many praises, and loudly singing the providence which has been their salvation. Thou knowest our frame, Thou rememberest that we are dust, poor sensitive, shrinking things without the heroic temper, without the daring spirit, afraid of our own shadows, afraid of the rustling in the twilight in the summer hedges. Oh that we had lived in God as He is known in Christ Jesus, the Christ of the Cross, the Jesus of Bethlehem and Calvary! then had we come into a great estate of honour and peace and quiet confidence, and we should have shown in all the ways of our daily life that they who trust in the Cross, in the God and Saviour of the Cross, have an infinity of calm, a tranquillity akin to the peace of God. Amen.

LXXX.

FEWNESS OF DAYS.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 6TH, 1900.

"*How long have I to live?*"—2 SAMUEL xix. 34.

HAVE been almost forced into this text because during the last few days people have been dropping down dead at my feet, without a moment's notice, but with a lifetime's preparation. I think some four of my friends have dropped down dead within a few days—ministers, fathers, men of position, and men exerting the most benign and sacred influence in life; and they have been struck down suddenly as a thunder-shower strikes the young flowers of the spring. So that again and again a weird voice has come singing round about me, "How long have I to live?" There is no answer to the question; the cleverest man amongst you cannot offer even a conjecture, much less a solution, to some of these tragical problems of life. All men live in uncertainty. A man is afraid that he will not live long enough to sign his own will. It is after he has given instructions to prepare the will that a curious feeling comes over him, implying that he may not be able to sign his own testamentary dispositions, and then an aggravating and most cruel voice says to his heart, Then whose shall those things be that thou hast stored? why, thou wilt die intestate, and the court will distribute thy rubbish. At other times man is so egregiously foolish that he never thinks of his life or of his death or of his will or of his family. They say he was a most loving man. Where is the will? The loving man made none. Call that love? It is frivolity, it is madness.

While these dear friends, some of them yet unburied,

are lying as to the body dead around me, I thought I would ask you to join me in asking this question, each for himself, "How long have I to live?" There is one answer that can be given with painful definiteness and certainty: we have not to live long; there is no length in life. The man in the text who asked this question is described as "very aged." How old was he? He is "a very aged man." Well, how old was he? He was "fourscore years old." Why, the roof he lives under is older than that; there is an old oak-tree chest outside his bedroom window double his age. "A very aged man . . . fourscore years old." What is that? A melting snowflake, a swiftly passing shuttle, a shadow chased by the sun, chased into non-existence. Oh that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider their latter end! Oh that men in all their adding up and multiplying and dividing, and all their little clever tricks in the first four rules of arithmetic, would say, each for himself, "How long have I to live?"

A very beautiful little story is this, told a thousand times and yet young as the morning dew. David had been chased about by a most cruel disloyalty and unfilial ingratitude and rebellion; things had gone very hardly with him; when he was in the very depths of despair a rich old Gileadite took compassion on the king, and said: I have fruit and bread and wine and stores divers and useful; come to me; bring thy following with thee: what is a king if he cannot feed another king, and what is a rich old man really worth if he is not prepared to give all he has to what he believes to be a good cause? The times got better, the long-tarrying sun came round and lighted up the fortunes of David; and David was going back to Jerusalem. David was not ungrateful, he remembered the rich Gileadite, and he said, Barzillai, come with me, come with me to Jerusalem; I am going back over the Jordan, and there will be a great reception and an endless festival; now renounce everything, and come and live with me in Jerusalem. David was always lavish both in love and in revenge; David did nothing by halves. The man who wrote the Psalms for the centuries told his own son Solomon to bring certain men's grey hairs, reddened with their own

blood, to the grave. How contradictory is man! He writes psalms that startle the heavens with their glory and high music, and then he writes as with a dying, trembling hand his will: See that Joab be stabbed, murdered, cut his throat, crush him, bring him to a great clot of blood, and bury the beast with curses. Perhaps it takes the one man to make the other. Psychology is very wonderful. Some men never would have written so eloquently or spoken so forcibly in the cause of right if their tempers had not been capable of being turned into very distressing use in other directions. We must be careful how we condemn men; we ourselves may come into great condemnation. God has made man in His own image, and of God we read, "God is love . . . God is a consuming fire."

Nay, said trembling Barzillai, my lord, permit me to beg off; I am old, and I have got used to my own city and my own folks; as for these poor old bones, they are not worth thinking about, but God has so made us that we must think about them, and I should like these poor outworn old bones to be buried near my father and my mother; beside—beside, what is the use of it? how long have I to live at fourscore years? I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. Here is a young man who will represent me well enough; he has all his life to live; he wants the mirth-song and the dance and the timbrel, the great king's feast; let him go. Young folks should marry young folks and should live their own life, but I, poor old inhabitant of Gilead, I do not want to be a burden even to the king: farewell; let me go. And Barzillai returned. The king had kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and the little tragedy was at an end. How glad we are that we did not go with some folks! It was a great temptation; my feet had well-nigh slipped, my soul had well-nigh given itself away; the bribe was so great, Jerusalem and the palace and the smile of the king and no work

and nothing to do but linger out my golden eventide. You are glad that you did not go with certain people at certain times. Do I not speak directly into the very centre of your experience? You were just about to go, and by a hairsbreadth you escaped going; you have been thankful ever since that that hairsbreadth intervened. It was a strong temptation at the time. What, you said, another thousand? Yes, and another ten thousand, and another ten thousand upon that, and another ten thousand. And a voice said, Deafen thine ears against this seductive appeal; there is death in this bribe, renounce it, go home poor. You heard the better voice and you went back to your own little Gilead, and you said it was better, and that somehow by mystic influence you had never missed the money, and you are a stronger man to-day than you would have been if you had taken it. You did not argue on the ground of age, but you argued upon some other ground, and no matter what that honest ground was, your argument prevailed and you are happy to-day.

Suppose we accommodate this inquiry of Barzillai, and apply it here and there along the sensitive line of our ever-changing life. It may do us good; we may be the better for cross-examining ourselves upon this matter of the possible or probable, certainly incalculable, period of life.

"How long have I to live," that I may make the most of what remains? That is a very proper question; we ought to ask ourselves that question every day. To make the most of what remains. What does remain? No man can tell. A breath. Where is your friend? He is dead. What thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; he that does it quickly does it twice. You have no time to lose; you have been haffling with yourself for the last six days, and you are six days nearer your end. Shall I do this deed of charity, or shall I not? Do it! I have had some thoughts of helping my friend in his distress, but I am just hesitating. You may hesitate too much and too long: do it now, and then think about it. You were going to do so many things for your friend, for your family, for your minister, for the country, for the

world, for the heathen, always being on the point of almost doing it. And one of the uncounted and uncountable darts of God struck you, and now you are not sure that you will live long enough to sign your own will. Foolish man! you should have written it twenty years ago; you have no right to tempt the Lord your God. There is only one time, and that time is mentioned in the Bible, and that is the only available and sure time, and I can tell you when it is. When is the only available and sure time? NOW! The Bible keeps that great dummy clock, and it stands at Now! Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. And you propose to make up some part of the lee-way that you may make the most of what remains? Let me see, how many years have you given to the devil? Fifty. And you suppose that fifty more remain? Very doubtful. Would it not now be well to make the most of what remains, to do the rest in gold, diamonds, and precious stones of every name? You may not be here next Sunday, I may not live to preach this evening; we had better be doing something. What say you? is not this wisdom? It is wisdom in secular things, why not in spiritual things? it is right in the matter of the health of the body, why not right in the matter of the health of the soul?

"How long have I to live," that I may set my house in order? You want a little time for preparation, you do not want to be hastened away so as to leave many things unarranged and unprovided for. What a beautiful thing it is to be able to stand over the grave of your friend, and to say, He did what he could; he was a sweet, heroic, valiant soul; in his own little way and sphere, take him for all in all, he was a man, we ne'er shall look upon his like again; so gentle as a father, so faithful as a friend, so wholly excellent and estimable in every capacity and aspect of life. If you want to set your house in order, make a just will. I know of no sweeter reading—and I myself have no recollection of ever having been named in a will, so I can speak the more without prejudice—I know no sweeter reading than a will after which men say, That is just, that is wisely conceived; the man makes no demands upon revenge, he does not

use any instrument of retaliation; he was a great-natured man, and he has disposed of everything justly; he was a righteous man. You do not want to be driven out of the world leaving everything unarranged, leaving your whole life's career in chaos. You do not know how much time remains; there may be still time to send for the solicitor or the representative of your family, the man on whose judgment and fidelity you will so largely depend. Why have you made no arrangement, no preparation? Are you going to leave a lawsuit to your family? Shame! But if I send for the solicitor, I shall feel I am going to die. That is old woman's nonsense, it does not suit your manhood at all. The arrangement for your latter end, whether it be legal, moral, social, whatever the arrangement may be, should be done calmly, with great deliberateness, and with a conscious realisation of the Divine presence. If I could tell you to-day that you have one hundred years yet to live, the case would be different; but, sir, O sir! hear me; you may die to-day.

"How long have I to live," that I may do the most important things first? There is a gradation in importance; some things are important, others are more important, others again are most important, are indeed of superlative and inexpressible importance. That is a graduated scale which commends itself to common sense: why not apply it in all the regions and outgoings of life? It is not enough to be busy; you must be busy at the right time, in the right place, and in the right work. To be busy is nothing; it may indeed be an aggravation of your unwisdom. What is the most important thing to do? I will not leave the most important undone or unconsidered. Have you been doing important things, Mr. Husbandman? Yes, I have been doing most important things. What have you been doing? This is the time for sowing seed, this is pre-eminently the time for seed-sowing: what have you been doing? I admit that seed-sowing is of great importance, but I have been spending the last six weeks in cleaning my windows. Was there ever such a fool on the soil? It is important to clean windows certainly, it is important to make a highway for the light, no

doubt; but at this particular time the thing important above all things is to sow the seed now. I am sure I have been exceedingly busy in cleaning all those windows. You have been busy at the wrong thing, busy at the wrong time, busy at the wrong place; to be busy is not the thing, but to be busy in a right way at the right time, and to be doing the right thing, and the only thing to be done in that one pregnant moment. How this would change our life! how this would rearrange all our plans! And is it not the way of common sense? If it is the way of common sense in the matter of husbandry, it is surely the way of common sense in the culture and preparation of the higher nature. I have in all these years met so many busy people—people that were always in a state of perspiration and excitement, and really were fatiguing themselves by continual, absolutely uninterrupted business. My friend, what about? Everything depends upon your answer to that. I know you have been busy, but you may have been so busy as not to be able to do anything, you may have been so fogged up that you did not really know which is the door and which is the window of your house. But you have been so busy, so active, and there is no keeping you still; your poetical wife said, There was really no getting him to sit down. I am sorry. Oh, that he had sat down for a long time! So many people are busy here and there, and letting the King pass by; so many people are busy that they never heard the prophet; they had heard something of him, but the great Ezekiel himself they never saw, the man of fire, the man all wings, the dweller in the heavens and on the earth; and when he had gone they said in a kind of gossipy cheerfulness that they never heard him. What have they been doing? No one knows; but so busy, so energetic, so active. But they might have heard Ezekiel and seen the prophet that read the colours of the amber and the fire and the motion of the wheel; but they never saw him. Oh that men were wise, that they understood just when to sow the seed, when to take the tide at the flood; oh that men were wise, that they bought up the opportunity as they would buy up a wedge of gold! The complaint is not that the men are indolent, but that they are

industrious at the wrong point and about the wrong thing. Lord, give me a wise and understanding heart that I may be busy about Thy business; then Thou will write what epitaph my industry and faithfulness may deserve.

"How long have I to live," that I may pay all that I owe? This is not a question of money only, it is a far greater question. What do you owe to your family? have you spoken enough to your boys? have you been a boy with them? so that people have sometimes been uncertain which is the boy and which is the father, so united and harmonious and mutually completing are your lives? Have you kept other vineyards and failed to keep your own vineyard? have you been so busy about the committee and with the Sunday-school and the church organisation and all the divers charities connected with the church that you are almost a stranger at home? How much owest thou to the past? Pay the bill of thy neglect, and take a receipt from the hand of God.

There we are face to face with the great fact that we may die at any moment; therefore we should ask the question, What is it to live? how long have I to live? I reply by asking another question, What do you mean by living? do you mean eating, drinking, self-indulgence? do you mean neglecting all things spiritual, invisible, and eternal? Then you and I are not attaching the same definition to the word live or living. To live means to live the life of faith, to live the loving life of trust in the Son of God and obedience to His Cross and to His will. We only live as we live and move and have our being in God. The life of the body is nothing, it perishes whilst we enjoy it or whilst we use it. "How long have I to live," O poor soul of mine? Dost thou ask me such question as a Christian preacher? Ask it again, and assure me that thine heart is in the piercing interrogation. How long have I to live? The answer is from the Christian pulpit: For ever.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou art gentle unto Thy creatures with a great gentleness. Thou dost stoop to the lowliness of their condition; Thou dost fill the vessel of their unbelief; Thou dost answer the cry of their perplexity. Thou art indeed a great and terrible God: yet who is like unto Thee in pity and mercy and the fulness of tears? God is a consuming fire,—God is love. We know it all, we can explain but little of it; we know the meaning of the fire and the meaning of the love, and we know that sometimes they are both the same thing. But we cannot see afar off; no man hath seen the to-morrow that is hidden in God's eternity. Make us humble, dependent, yet expectant. We thank Thee for Thy way of education, it is like the way of no other teacher; Thou dost train us by a way that we know not, and Thou dost lead us by the same way, and Thou dost separate between the know and the know-not as with sunbeams. O, how strange is Thy way! how heavy Thy rod, yet how gentle Thy hand! We cannot tell the meaning of all this; we are like poor outsiders who have not seen the inside of the house of God and its great meaning. May we wait, may we be sure that Thou art love; then we can live, though all waiting is hard to men made like ourselves. We are impatient, fretful, too easily disappointed; we hear the tender cry in the air, How is it that you have no faith? when we might have a whole heartful, and by the power of the Cross and the sanctification of the Holy Ghost might rule the world, the flesh, and the devil, and subdue them under our feet. Lord, increase our faith! Amen.

LXXXI.

THE POINT OF PERPLEXITY.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, MAY 24TH, 1900.

"*We cannot tell what He saith.*"—JOHN xvi. 18.

HAT is a point in the history of the soul which often passes without recognition. We are great on infidels, we deliver courses of lectures upon blatant and vulgar infidelity; some men have made their reputation along those lines. And others are great on triumphant faith; some ready skilful writers have written hymns of victory for the use of the Church in its highest mood. We thank God for such poets and prophets. But the we-cannot-tell period—has that period any lyrist, any poet of high and worthy aim? We are all now and then in the we-cannot-tell period, and has any man arisen to turn our cannot-tell into some kind of joyous and hopeful psalm? Will you kindly suspend your lectures to absentee infidels, and come to these poor souls who are fumbling and groping and crying, We cannot tell whether this should be, or that should be, or whether we are now going exactly to the right or somewhere to the left. What a field there is unoccupied for the souls in the cannot-tell period! We dare not mention it even in prayer; and yet here we are with all these problems round about, all these great unsolved enigmas; yet we would like to know what the answer is. Sometimes, perhaps, our prayer descends to prying, and then God cuts it in two with a sharp wind. But there is a desire that is holy, there is a going round and round problems and looking at them with a wonder that is almost an answer, with a great and delicate expectancy which mounts sometimes as high as prayer. You know how skilfully you have answered the unbeliever, you have ground

him to powder, you have cut him into small pieces, you have scorned him and driven him away, and have had no mercy or pity on his unbelieving soul: have you any genius left that you can expend upon the fumblers and gropers who believe that at any moment they may see the Lord, and get the key from His girdle, and go up and down opening the secret drawers in the marvellous cabinet of mysteries? These men are not unbelievers; they are not to be treated with contempt or with neglect; they are earnest men, and they see a great deal further than many men who condemn them. Yet they have quite a large bundle of problems, and they are saying to one another, Do you know anything about this? have you one little trembling ray of light like the trembling of the receding star? No, I have not. Have *you*? Well, but yesternight, I thought I saw some light on that problem; I am going to watch to-night specially; mayhap to-night I may see that star that seems to light all the other stars; come, watch with me: who knows what we may see to-night? Mark all the periods through which the poor soul passes. There is a great period of downright unbelief, in which a man has no faith but in his own disbelief; he denies the Bible, he denies God, he denies the Cross, he denies all the religious possibilities and prophecies, and he seems to grow proud of his unfaith. There is no mistaking that man. We have all passed through that period; we have been dead in trespasses and sins, and we have seemed to take a kind of gleeful delight in our want of faith. We are not in a negative relation to the great verities, but at the period now within contemplation we simply repudiate them, scoff them, yea, we would break them in pieces like a potter's vessel if we could. We have passed through that rude, miserable state of semi- if not total idiocy. There are men who are still in that period of development; they smile, if they do not broadly laugh, at the idea of an inspired book, actually translated into our mother tongue; and as to entering the sanctuary of God and taking part in simple, holy exercises of worship, such an idea would be utterly beneath their intellectual dignity, as they themselves measure it. I say that regarding that class of persons we have no doubt, and they need have no doubt about themselves; their position is defined, rampant, outrageous.

Then there is another kind of faith; I will call it, if you please, for want of a happier term, faith *minus*. It is not without positiveness, it has a certain fleeting life of its own; yet in the statement of the creed there is a great disjunctive which separates the parts, dividing them almost asunder. That state of mind was beautifully represented by the dear, sweet creature who uttered the creed of the whole Church, in some of its moods, when he said, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." That is what I say when I hear all the creeds of the churches. I do not believe in creeds written and subscribed and sworn-to and forgotten. Yet when I read these gatherings up of holy words, and feel as it were the pulses of the ages trembling in those syllables I say, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief: I have sung this creed to Thee, but I do not believe it all, and I would gladly believe a great many things which I have not yet received into my faith; Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief, that it may be sphered out into a great planet-like faith, a complete star and glow of confidence intellectual and spiritual.

See how we advance!—the first man a blatant unbeliever, rejoicing in his want of faith, and contemning with cold, cruel scorn the men who do believe. Then we come to faith *minus*, faith that would eke out its own unbelief, and failing there would seek the Lord's aid in eking it out. Do not treat these people unkindly, because if you treat them unkindly you treat them unwisely and unjustly; they want to pray as much as you pray, they would like to live on the mountains, right away on the hilltops, which catch the first kiss of the morning sun; they cannot climb so high just yet, we must go down to them, and say that presently, it may be, in the power and grace of God and His Christ, they will be up to the very gate and portal of the morning, the gate which has a precious stone, and there they will see Aurora in all her bridal beauty, and she will kiss them because they are seeking her love and benediction. Do not boast of your semi-faith; let there be no boasting. Some men make a kind of god of their infidelity. They do not know that they are moulding a little clay deity of their own, but they are

doing so nevertheless; they have their own little ways of worship, and their own petty and futile deities; and there is a subtle possibility that a man may be hawking round his semi-belief or his semi-unbelief, and may be seeking to attract attention by his quavering but most conscious unbelief. Beware of that state of mind. O, be frank, white of heart, really candid, spiritually bright—because all the colours are blent into one beauty of holiness.

And then we can go into another region, and find a man who is no infidel, but a plain doubter. There are so many cattle in that pen that I should like to have them carefully counted before asking much about them. But there are the doubters: can we not send them away on some long excursion; can we not bring to bear upon them all that is kind and all that is intellectually superior; and thus treat them according to the grade of their unbelief? We cannot. Some men make a religion of doubt. When a man calls himself an honest doubter I always ask in a polite voice and tone for his references. An honest doubter? No honest man calls himself honest; the moment he begins to tell me that he is now speaking honestly I know that he never did speak honestly, because honesty, transparency, speaks like a little child, speaks exactly what is the truth at the moment, and is not afraid of being inconsistent because it talks differently at seven to what it did at three years of age. I say to this boy, You are inconsistent; when I last saw you, you were just three years old, and you talk quite differently to-day; and therefore I charge you with inconsistency. There is an inconsistency of growth. I find the brick wall where I left it, I never find the young growing tree just where I saw it last; there is another leaf a little further out, there is a branch struggling to be just as long and strong as any other branch. That is the inconsistency I love, the inconsistency of growth, evolution, development, progress: Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Beware, however, of being a sort of doubter that requires to be often invited out to tea to have itself relieved by kind and misunderstanding friends who whisper, Sh! I think he is improving. There are some infidels who become the more infidels the more that they are

infidelled. If you would let them alone they would soon come in for something substantial and nutritious to eat. Have the gospel ready, the high verities, the great house of God filled with the bread of the Father, and when you hear a tap on the door fly to open it, and bid the knocker welcome to the feast of Christ's body and blood and heart and atoning love.

Thus we have had these three people before us—the disbeliever, and the believer *minus*, and the doubter, who calls himself Thomas, greatly to the disgust of the original Thomas—and then we come to the great, the supreme act of belief itself. I have been waiting to see that lovely face; I knew it would come,—belief, trust in God, really going over to the Almighty through the Cross and by the power of the Eternal Spirit. What a face is the face of Faith! how it glows like the morning, beams and gleams like June's brightest noontide; and what a summerlike freshness and abundance there is about the faith that conquers and works by love! Said Christ to one poor soul, "Believest thou that I am able to do this?" And he said, "Lord, I believe." Enough! the miracle was done whilst the man was breathing his confession. That man had no greater figure in history by which he could stand than the figure of Abram when the Lord said unto him in a night watch, Behold these things; look up: canst thou count their number? as their number is so shall be the number of thy seed. And Abram is reported to have believed God. Now there arises the Abram of the New Testament, who says, "Lord, I believe." Then be it unto thee as thou wilt; take what thou canst of heaven; be a man in thy faith.

But now we come to the class of the text, "We cannot tell what He saith"; we come to the point of perplexity. It may be thus, or it may be so: what thinkest thou, John, James, Peter? are you all silent? So am I. "A little while, and ye shall see Me; a little while, and ye shall not see Me, because I go unto the Father." What is this that He saith? we cannot tell what He saith. We are at the cannot-tell period. No infidels are we and no doubters; it is still *He*,—that wondrous pronoun that gathers

into its ample meaning and its glowing love all the nouns that have ever represented Him in the grammar of history. What is this that He saith? we cannot tell what He saith. It is still He, the living, beautiful One, the brother-sister, the man-woman of the race, who carries the crown and a Cross; for He is the Lord that saved the world.

Many of us are at this point, we cannot explain the words of Jesus; we are glad that many of them are yet without explanation; we have no confidence in those people who know all about it, as they would vulgarly say. We want to have knowledge enough to make us silent; we want to know enough that we may pray in a humble tone. There are persons who know all that the Almighty thought in the counsels of eternity; there are people who can write it all down in plain black ink, and make other men swear to it, or cast them out as heterodox and an unbelieving and noisome nuisance. I do not want to belong to that class. I am rich in having a revelation concerning large parts of which I say, I cannot tell what they say. "All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers." What is this that He saith? "All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers." Well, Moses came before Him, many of the great teachers and moralists came before Him: what is this that He saith? All that ever came before Him are thieves and robbers? We cannot tell what He saith. But He said so much other than this that the greater quantity helps to relieve the darkness of the smaller, helps indeed to make that smaller a puzzle for the education rather than for the destruction of faith. "All that ever came before Me." What was the year in which Plato came? and what was the year in which the great Latin moralists taught? what was the age in which the great Moses read the tables of the law to the people? My good people, you are altogether on the wrong track of inquiry. "All that ever came before Me" is not a clock phrase, is not a time quantity; any man that sets himself "before" Christ, in front of Christ, who attempts to supersede Christ or to render Christ unnecessary, he is a thief and a robber, whenever he lived, and even if he be living to-day. And there are men who set themselves before Christ this morning,

But they cannot live; place after place they haunt is given over to the spiders; there is not enough in their poor weazened faith to pay the ground rent. They cannot live. If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed you can live, and no intellectual dandy can put you down in the long run. What lives is faith. What is faith? Life in God:—"He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." What is this that He saith? All men that live and believe in Him shall never die? We cannot tell what He saith; Peter, James, John are going over the first line—Paul, do you know what He means—"He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die"? My dear ones, say you, thinking of husband or wife or child or friend or pastor, surely lived and surely believed, and yet they are dead: what is this that He saith? "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." That word "die" has puzzled the ages; like all the other great words, it occurs first in the book of Genesis, and it has been a fruitful source of mischief because of misunderstanding all these ages. No man can explain fully and exhaustively the word die; it is a dead language, an unknown tongue. And yet now and again we seem to feel that it is still alive and has meanings in it that we can at least dimly apprehend. But death is often an abused and often a misused word. Why, I heard of death. What have you heard of death? I heard that death is swallowed up in victory. "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

"Except a man eat My flesh and drink My blood, there is no life in him." What is this that He saith? "Eat My flesh, drink My blood"—what, can this Man give us His flesh to eat? What ignorant questions we ask; how wanting in spiritual imagining, in that great dream power of the soul that escapes merely circumstantial theology and enters into the very heart and breath of God. How can this Man be in twenty different places at once, in two thousand different places at once? how can He be here and yonder, miles away at the same time? He said to us in the very first interview we had with Him, "The Son of Man which is in heaven." Yet we were standing looking at Him, He was sitting on the earth, and He said the Son of Man is in heaven; how can He be both on

earth and in heaven at the same time? Because He was the Son of God. "Lo, I am with you even unto the end of the world,"—wherever you go in My name I go with you. A perplexity in merely human words; no perplexity at all in the glow and triumph of faith.

So then we come again, you see, to the point of perplexity. There are scriptures we can hardly read, let them alone for the time being; there are other scriptures that we can only partially explain, and we go to them now and then to see if the buds be opening and if we can inhale fresh fragrance in the King's garden; there are other passages that mothers can speak to children, and children can understand by their hearts, and in these passages we revel and triumph and hold sweet sacrament. Why do you not confine yourselves to those things that you can really take hold of and apply and profit by? Why will you be endeavouring to read books you cannot read? Let them alone; not for ever, mayhap, but for the time being, and keep to your psalm, your sweet Jesus words, to the smile of the Master, to the encouragement of the apostles. I hope some day some strong man, who is ready to be slain by the Church, will arise, and read us the Bible by the distribution of progressive steps, so that we shall end with Moses, and thus understand what Moses meant, go back to roots and origins and plasms, and thus interpret the Old Testament by the New and the New by the Old, and find that they are the same sacrament, and the same Testament, and the same covenant with the souls of men. But we are so timid. Every man that has yet risen to do something in the world has been killed. Be perfectly sure of that, and be quite sure that ye will rise again in the proportion in which you are true, in which you have anticipated the time and rode three centuries in the van. But O, before it comes to pass what ostracism, what starvation, what gathering-up of robes and passing-by of those who have not the same flame or the same sight and passion of faith!

Now how did Jesus Christ treat this point of perplexity? First of all, He did not rebuke it; He said, What ye know not now ye shall know hereafter: I

keep a great school known by the name Hereafter, and you will be promoted to that higher school in due time; do not expect to do everything in twelve hours, do not expect to do everything within the little span of your life; hereafter ye shall see, hereafter ye shall know: I have many things to say unto you, but you could not bear them now; why, you could not even hear them now, you would not understand them now; for My revelation is gradual and progressive, it is like the path of the just man, shining more and more unto the perfect day,—and we forget that we ever saw the grey, cold time of winter. He does not do away with the point of perplexity; He says, it is good for you to have this puzzle, work away at that in the meantime; do not be impatient, do not tear the organ to pieces in order to see where the music comes from, and do not be taking up the roots of the flowers to see how the roots are getting on. Simply wait; O, wait upon the Lord, wait patiently for Him, and He will come with the morning star. Yes, Jesus Christ satisfies perplexity with a promise: Not now, but in another time.

Are we at the cannot-tell period of Christian experience? Well, men have been there before us; Jesus Christ noted the people who were at that point and treated them with great gentleness, with ineffable love. Hear the soliloquies of perplexity, hear the moan of the non-understanding of some words that He saith:—Why am I so unfortunate? I pray seven times a day with my window open to Jerusalem, but no white dove comes to me with an answer from the gardens of God: O, why am I so outrun and overborne with business and trade and competition? there is always one man gets in before I get down to the troubled pool. O, what is this that He saith? I seem to have taken hold of one end of the promise, but I am unable to take hold of the other end of the promise. O, why so poor, so harassed; and my next-door neighbour has plenty, and a man just within sight of my window has abundance upon abundance, and I live all day and all night in the cold companionship of poverty. O, why am I so bereaved? why may I not have had that life spared to me? It would have done God no harm, it would have done me an infinite good, so far

as I can see the case at present. I cannot tell what He doeth, I cannot tell what He sayeth. O, how is this? Jesus understands the perplexity, and He is going to make that perplexity an education and a comfort and a triumph; and I will one day have to ask His pardon for misreading His words and misinterpreting His providence. We cannot tell. Hereafter, the explanation long delayed will be forthcoming. Then we shall praise the Lord in a great thunder song, one emulating the other to be the louder and the sweeter in the great anthem.

CONCLUDING PRAYER.

KING of kings and Lord of lords, we remember that this is the eighty-first birthday of our own beloved monarch, Queen Victoria. God bless her! ("Amen!"), add many to the days of her years, and give her great joy in the growth and peacefulness of her kingdom. And we remember dear Mrs. Gladstone, nearly eighty-nine; a comfort to many, a name to be remembered by those who keep their memory in their hearts. God bless her, and her family, and bring up all her great memories and turn them into gracious solaces. May grace, mercy, and peace, the triune blessing of the Triune God, abide with us, till we see the King of kings. Amen.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou hast undertaken the conduct of our life, and we will not through unbelief interfere with the action of Thy providence. We will go up the hill and down into the valley as Thou mayest decide, into the wilderness or the garden as Thou dost please, where the fresh fountains play or where there is no water for our thirst: Thy will be done; pay no heed to ours. Thou knowest Thine own end and purpose, and Thou wilt bring all things to bear thereupon; may we learn the piety of silence, may we speak not whilst the Lord is present, may we be dumb before the Most High, and commit our way into Thy hand. We bless Thee for many shinings of the morning, we thank Thee for many a golden hour; we remember that we have walked by the blue sea when there was no storm upon all its waters. We remember too that Thy way towards us has been full of mystery, and yet we dare not question Thee; we had a question upon our lips, but we stifled it; Thou didst give us the victory which overcomes, even faith upon faith which means assured triumph. We nearly asked Thee, we were on the point of breaking silence, sometimes we could hardly keep in our breath, for it was hot with riotousness, and behold, the spirit of unbelief did drive us into the wilderness so that we were tempted of the devil. Thou hast tried us sorely; we have nearly fallen upon those things which Thou hast taken away, and nearly have we cried that Thou shouldst not have them. Thou hast given unto us bitter bread, Thou hast given unto us also waters of sorrow; Thou hast sometimes seemed to us to be very hard in Thy judgment, and to have lost Thy mercy and Thy tears. We have cried out bitterly against Thee; we dare not always put our bitterness into words, but it was none the less bitter. We said, Why is this? we said, O Lord, how long? and we nearly hurled great questions at Thee which would have been as blows in Thy face. Oh, how narrow is the road, how strait is the gate, how difficult is the path! But seeing that the end of all is righteousness and purity and heaven, we will endeavour to be men in Thy spirit and by Thy grace, and not complain. Thou knowest the wildness of our grief, the scorching heat of our misery; Thou interpretest all the unspoken desires, and sometimes Thou dost secretly answer the problem that is too much for our faith. Yet, remembering all this, and quietly receiving it as from the Lord, we will recall the sunny days, the earlier times, when Thou wast more manifestly with us, when

Thou didst shine upon us as the morning shines upon the opening flowers. This is the miracle of Thy Cross, this is the great wonder of Thy love. O Thou Man, Son of man, whose seals are five red wounds, torn and gashing into the flesh, let every blooddrop of Thine be an encouragement to us. The Lord hear us, for there must be something in this wild woe after all; we must wait in the appointed Jerusalem, till shall come the interpreting Spirit and the delivering Lord. Amen.

LXXXII.

UNSPOKEN INQUIRIES.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 27TH, 1900.

"*Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him*"—JOHN xvi. 19.

HE saw their lips shape into a question. But they dare not go any further. This presents Christ to us in a most interesting and pathetic aspect. He knows the unspoken prayer—blessed be God! There are prayers we dare not put into words; there are wonders and problems to which we dare not give expression. We do not know one another sufficiently, or we would know that behind many an utterance of faith there is a deep moan of unbelief. We put our best selves forward on many occasions, and we do so without pretence or conceit; we try to think ourselves into better selves, and in advance we speak the great words we shall one day speak as part of the current experience and reality. Sometimes we store our prayers; they are the prayers that are going to be answered in a month, perhaps next year; we have many entries into the execution of which we have not yet come. We have pledged to meet the Lord under a hawthorn bush, in a wide green field, in some little bay by the sea that nobody knows of but ourselves. We must not be taken just at the moment as always realising the high triumphs which we venture to express in words; they are the triumphs that are going to be, the victories of the

long-coming to-morrow. We can only enter into these mysteries and eternities by prolonged, deep long-suffering and long-torturing experience.

The happiness is that Jesus Christ knows all about this; He knows the questions we would like to ask, how many they are, how urgent. This is the comfort, that Jesus knows every one of them. Is there not some significant smile of all-love and half-pity upon His face as He watches the prayers we dare not pray, as He sees the questions struggling and choking in our very throats, and yet we dare not give them audible utterance? We are two men, we are dual, bivalvular, binary stars, contradictions, mutual self-completions, and a mass of paradox and inconsistency. The comfort of it all is that Jesus knows it all. We can almost penetrate His thought, He has made us so familiar with the method of His pity. Poor disciples! and yet we are just like them, our experience is identical with theirs. Oh the questions we would like to ask! Yet we feel that the asking of them would be an act of impiety; we seem to feel as if the asking of a question would be an act of bankruptcy in the great course of a living faith, and as if, asked we such questions, we should give up all the old things, all the old resounding psalms, all the venerable creeds and holy verities on which our souls fed long, long ago. Yet we want to ask the questions, and Jesus knows that we are desirous to ask them. Let us watch Him coming along; He may interpret our attitude and give it words. The Lion of the tribe of Judah hath the power to open all seals; He may rend the seal of our ignorance and our agonising desire. Let us tarry awhile here and there. Jesus will find us out, and we can so look that He will understand the expression, and so kind is He that He may find words for our silence and our distress.

Jesus finds us sitting by the grave, and He knows that we are desirous to ask Him, and we dare not. So we can only look; but what a look it is! how it tears the heavens in twain, how it pleads with the eloquence of miserable silence! He pauses, He draws near; He also looks as well as we do; there is a

masonry of facial expression; He knows the meaning of the dumbness, and knows that it is the biggest eloquence we ever poured out of our lips, and yet we dare not but restrain the growing flood lest we should grieve Him by unintentional impiety. Dare you ask Him? You are on terms of great familiarity with this Jesus who is now almost bending over us—dare you tell Him our desire? The grave is so little, and it is the first grave we ever dug in our house; it is the burial-place of a little flower I am desirous to ask Him why the flower ever budded; I am desirous to ask Him how He thinks we can partake of the sacrament of silent misery when we go back this summer afternoon to our lonely home. Dare you ask Him, wife?—a woman hath greater power than a man. Jesus knows that we are desirous to ask Him, and as to the disciples so to us He says, "Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me?" He begins, thus He gives us liberty; now let the flood of our questions rush upon His attentive ear; something may come out of this interview. Always let Jesus begin; He knows when to open the holy conference; He pities the silence that is killing us. Other people have a good many collateral and indirect comforts and solaces, but we had only this one; when that one went all went. The man who has only one ewe lamb is not to be thought of as one of the people who have flocks that make the hillsides alive; the man who has only one fig-tree is not to be treated as a man whose figs and olives and vines are not to be counted in human numbers. Can Jesus reach a case like mine? you say. Yes, He can; there is nothing we ever suffered that He has not suffered, only a thousand times more intensely in all that strains the very nerves of the soul. If any one else has suffered this, I have already divided my misery; find me my companion-sufferer; Jesus knows that I am desirous to ask Him, and perhaps through this companion He may send me an answer: O come thou, sent by the Son of God. You do not know how much of real comfort and strength you would part with if you asked all your questions in plain words. There is a comfort in reservation; reticence has its own sanctuary

into which it retires as into a deeper self-preservation. Sometimes misery is the very jewel of joy. We cannot teach these things in a school, we cannot take pence and shillings for the teaching of such meanings; we must live them, and come out of them as strong men, and then we shall know they cannot be taught in words.

Jesus Christ is coming this way to-day; let us be found reading His holy book and stopping at the difficult places. He comes; I see Him but a yard or two away; now you look quietly and intently at the hard places; find them all out, mark them with markings of the hand and of the heart, and be speaking them—sh!—just as He passes; He will know that we are desirous to ask Him. Let us not be fools who look only at the hard places, and think they are the whole revelation; there is a better method. We should look at the words we can understand, and then at the words we cannot understand, and He may find us just between the two points: who knows but that He may explain His own word? Never man spake like this Man. The oil of grace is poured into His lips; He can speak to misery as if He had lived with it all His life, and He can, as we have just said in a recent exposition, touch a wound without hurting it. Many of us are at the hard places of the Bible; we are desirous to ask the Writer of the holy book, and we dare not put the question; but He knows that we are desirous to ask Him. Sometimes, instead of answering us directly, He quietly, as a summer breeze might do it, turns over the page, and then there are words that a child cannot misunderstand, great full-blown promises:—I will never leave thee, I will never forsake Thee. We can understand that. There are passages I cannot understand, and therefore I will not go and interrogate them, and waste my spiritual energy in endeavouring to level them down to my poor mode of speech; I will go back to that further promise, I will make myself quite at home in the jewel-house of heaven, I will make myself rich with the exceeding great and precious promises with which God has supplied the storehouse of the Church. Why should I be so perverse as to go to the hard texts which I never can understand, and leave all the texts that a

child might comprehend? I will feed upon the bread, though I cannot understand the process of germination; I know the true bread, and I know that it alone can satisfy mine hunger: why should I trouble myself about chemical questions which I have not learned or which I have not intellectual capacity enough to penetrate and comprehend? Very often Jesus Christ does not answer the hard text, but He simply turns over the page, as I have already said, and almost finger-marks it, as who should say, That is the answer; what more you want will come in life's far-off to-morrow; meanwhile here is a question bathed in the sunlight and seen at the noonday of conscious love.

That is what I am endeavouring to do as a preacher of the Word. I do not understand the Bible; here and there I understand a little part of it, and to that little part I cling with all the intensity of my love. Do not expect anybody to be able to explain all the mysteries of divine revelation; otherwise you would reduce the exposition of the Scriptures to a science or a fine art, or a priestly trick, or something that can only come by great intellectual expertness: whereas the Word of God is not that hard text or the other; it is something that breathes through all the texts, hard and simple, and unites them into one grand, luminous, sympathetic, redeeming revelation. Do not suppose that preachers have no Biblical difficulties. I am standing in a harvest-field full of such difficulties; I am no priest, I am a fellow-student, I am a brother suppliant; if I have lived a little longer than some other men, and I am able to explain a passage here and there, so be it, that is lovely, that is true co-operation of soul. Let us set aside all the very hard passages and say, When the Lord comes He will throw light upon them all, and until He does come He has given us passages enough to be going on with—bread passages, and gifts of living water, and consolations that can hunt every misery out of the soul and fill the soul with morning light, which is morning hope.

So, if we review the whole scheme and economy of life, there are many things we would like to ask Jesus. How is it that this man prospers, and he never prays? How is it that I have to make all my life a hard

study so as to keep out of debt and misery, and I try to pray? Jesus knows that I am desirous to ask Him; I want to know about the mystery of the divine going, I want to know why the garden of the atheist brings forth flowers abundantly, and the garden of the suppliant has not a single flower within its four borders. I should like to ask my Lord that question, but I do not know how to put it; I might imperil my own faith by inquiring into the metaphysics of other people's unbelief. Oh, if He would start the subject I would tell Him about twenty whose lives are complete mysteries as viewed from a Christian standpoint; they bet and gamble and swear, and riot and revel and dance, and cannot get through their money. I would tell Him then of the poor woman who cannot make money enough to pay her rent. If He would begin the subject! He may do some day; then I will venture upon it, and embrace the opportunity of having all my doubts cleared up, and I will be glad to have some divine illumination upon the plan of providence. Meanwhile I am an Asaph with a song he dare not sing, a harp he dare not use, a question he may not ask.

The very desirousness to ask is a proof of the existence of some faith in the soul. That is a delightful and most vital point. Our very perplexities may be evidences of our faith. If we had no faith, who would care to ask any questions about this chaotic, tumultuous world? Why not join in the uproarious atheism and get what gladness you can out of it? It is because there is something tugging at the heart, it is because there is a pleading voice saying, Do not give up faith; many things are but for a moment; life has its visions filmy and transient; you cannot give up your faith without giving up your very soul's soul, the very innermost plasm of being. It is everything to keep that wondrous belief. Take it with all the possible questions and stings and miseries. You must have manifold experience of life, and there is nothing that can so surely and completely support and sustain you as the faith that the outcome of the whole chaotic movement will be a palace, a temple of the holy presence. You do not want to ask every question to-day; you do not want to consume this morning all the bread you have in the

house; you lay up in store; you say, There is a future, and we must make some provision for it. Now in the spiritual world there is a future, and we must be prepared to wait for it. Tarry ye in Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high. When the power comes you will know it: flame has a way of making itself known.

Unasked questions need not mar believing prayers. After all, the unasked questions may not be necessary to the edification of the soul. God may educate us by not allowing us to tell everything we want to tell. Self-control is the last result of true power. Not to ask may be to ask. Sometimes not to pray may be the best prayer. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. Oh, if He would begin! He will some day, and it will be a long day, a day without an evening star. The child does not cast away the home letter because there is a word here and there which he cannot make out; nor does the child depreciate the letter because he has now and then, it may be, to go to the dictionary to find out the meaning of some word. Why, the mother may have put those words in on purpose; she said in her heart, He is fond of looking up the dictionary, now this will give him a chance; I put in a long word where I might have put a short one to educate the child, to excite his attention, and to lead him into further inquiry. Sometimes I myself write a letter—nay, many times; it is one of my eccentricities—all badly spelt; I know what interest it will excite at the other end. I spell receive with *ie*, and believe with *ei*, and with all sorts of little orthographical tricks I fill up the page. The child at first is amazed, exclaims indeed what a bad speller I am; then at the end of the letter I say, "Please excuse the spelling," and the child thinks that I have been up to something. And so I have, and for his sake; because in a post-script I say, "Will you be good enough to mark all the misspelt words in this letter, and let me have it back again?" What do we know about the home scheme of Providence, the upside-downness of many things, the eccentric plan of no-plan? All these things may come to be revealed to us by-and-by, and then we may find that all the while the Lord

has been educating us, arresting our attention, asking us to pay attention. The Lord's way must be done, it is the best way: trust Him!

Now desire may mean life. A dead body does not desire; the living body does desire, and must have its food, its water, and its due attention. Desire may mean inspiration, as who should say on the part of God, Let it be so that this soul may inquire and be cheered and fired into the exercise of nobler energy. Sometimes it may mean trust. I will trust him where I cannot trace him; he is out of my sight now, but he will return. This providence seems very hard, but the Lord doeth all things well. That is true confidence. As we have had occasion to see before, many people never trust their friends; they call them friends and then distrust them. Thus: A man being my friend, and being charged with something—any fool can charge or accuse another—am I to say, Is that possible; he must have forgotten himself for the moment, he must have been overpowered by a sudden temptation; I will ask him to explain the whole thing to me? Never! Ask my friend to explain?—then he is no longer my friend, he is outside my trust. I say to the accuser, Never! it is a lie you have heard! Yet there are many loose-jointed friends who believe anything that is bad. They would believe that you, the senior member of the church, had stolen a horse yesterday if they were told so. What wide, soft, flabby mouths they have! —they could swallow a sack!—instead of standing up and saying, No! I know nothing about your miserable case, but it is a lie. That is trusting a friend; not setting him upon his trial and interviewing him with the intention of finding out whether he did it or not.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, in Thee is no death. In the Lord our God there is no darkness. Jesus Christ has come to give men light, and to give men life more abundantly, yea, wave upon wave of life, yea, immortality. We bless Thee that we live in Christ; this is eternal life, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. May we seek for no other life, for other life there is none; behold, the soul that sinneth it shall die. May the Saviour's reproach never fall upon us, Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life May we all hasten to the Saviour day by day, yea, at dawn and at eventide may we repair to the Fountain that is full of life; thus may our eternity in Christ be established, and our immortality become an immediate and blessed possession. We thank Thee for all thoughts that lift us above the time-sphere and above all space, and that connect us with the kingdom of Thine own heart that we may be fellow inhabitants of Thine eternity, Thou Everlasting One, and may enter into the mystery of Thy being that is neither night nor day, but one eternal Now. Deliver us from vain thoughts and little thoughts, and all thoughts that vex and torment the mind and prevent its carrying out its great purpose in the love of the Cross. Be Thou our guest, our abiding one; take up Thine abode with us, and fill our hearts with Thine own heaven. We have come for a little rest, we have retired from the hot footpath, from the thoroughfares of commerce, and we have come into the sanctuary that we may wait a little and tarry before God in expectant prayer. Behold, we remember that now there came a great wind from heaven and shook the place where Thy loved ones were assembled; may we become prepared for the outpouring of the Spirit, and through Jesus Christ our Saviour, whose five wounds are five seals, may we expect the Spirit and be ready to receive the glory. Amen.

LXXXIII.

DEVOURERS AND ENDEAVOURERS.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, MAY 31ST, 1900.

"*It devoured men.*"—EZEKIEL xix. 3.

IT was a beast, and yet it devoured men—men that were intended in the divine purpose and love to be sons of God. It was no ordinary quality of men that this beast learned to devour; the message is delivered to "the princes of Israel." "What is thy mother?" A woman—degraded, beastialised. "A lioness . . . and she brought up one of her whelps; it became a young lion, and it learned"—a word to be specially noted—"to catch the prey; it devoured men." The whole lamentation is allegorical. Never omit the ideal from your criticism. We may unduly exalt the ideal or parabolical, or we may unduly repress it, and, shutting it out of our purview, we may starve our highest faculties and get nothing out of the Bible but letters, syllables, written and printed in iron and in ink.

"It devoured men." That is an allegorical lion, a beast that lived long ago, a beast that is dead. There you mistake the whole case. This ravenous lion is not only a lion now, but the beast is alive in every one of us. We go to sundry gardens and other public resorts to see the lions; how lost to the true sense of things are men who think that lions in their truest meaning are beasts in cages that may be visited at so much per head. Sir, you,—madam, you, have a beast in you; you are beast,—and God. This is the diagnosis which I have made of my own heart; I know I have a devouring beast in me that wants to devour my prayers before I have uttered them; I know there is a bloodsucker in my heart that wants to drink the red blood of my devotion before I can possibly pour it out as an oblation and token of

homage before my redeeming God. Why do we not look upon the Bible as published to-day? Why think of Ezekiel, with all his allegorical wheels and visions and parables and dreams – why think of him as a character belonging to a hoary antiquity, a time that was exciting enough in its own way whilst it passed over the surface of the earth, but now dead and gone? It is not so. If your Bible is only a letter, I have no wonder at all that you have lost it. People may misplace things, people may put them where they cannot find them again. Why? Because they are things, something to be handled and looked at and moved about. But who can mislay himself? who can mislay his own soul? Therefore it is that the Bible is the newest book in all the world; it has in it all news; it contained all the intelligence before the intelligence was so to say created by fact. Men will not believe this; they are going in quest of new information and confirmation, whereas the whole thing, the whole human history, is in the Bible. How many of these people before me, Thou God that piercest the heart, have really read the Bible this morning; I mean much of Thy book, quite a considerable portion of Thy revelation? I do not ask Thee who has glanced at the book and read the shortest psalm, but who has this morning bathed himself in the Bible river?

There are two classes in the world at this moment —why should we not recognise them both, and apply and store such practical truths as we may be able to realise?—there are two classes going forth this morning and every morning; one may be called, what they call themselves indeed, Endeavourers; the other, wanting to imitate their name and almost forge the label of God's wine, call themselves Devourers. There they are, and you can follow which band you please – endeavourers, devourers,—and you cannot belong to the betwixt-and-between party. Perhaps you would not like to belong to the endeavourers, because that name may have to your perverted taste somewhat of cant and infatuation about it, and you want to see how the idea goes on before you join it, and you will join it most lovingly when it does not need you. There are many persons waiting to

applaud me as soon as I become a very great man. Then they are my friends, they always were my friends; they had not said much about it perhaps, but they always had a warm side to me, and if ever I became a millionaire twice over and were the prime favourite of the throne, why, of course they knew me. So it is with many religious programmes, conceptions, and policies; when they establish themselves in public confidence and reputation, then perhaps there may be some dainty souls that may offer a rejected patronage. And you do not perhaps, on the other hand, like to belong to the devourers; you would not like to imagine that any of your faculties could possibly be so vulgarised and prostituted as to become associated with the awful process of devouring anybody. But you want to belong to the between class, neither an endeavourer nor a devourer. And yet you must be one or the other. God has but two hands, and it is to the right or to the left, and we must by the grace of God or under the temptation of the devil decide which—but one it must be.

What remark occurs to you when thinking about the devourers? A very commonplace remark, but only commonplace because it is profoundly true. The devourer always takes the easy course. That is why I contemn him. God never takes easy courses. Jesus never took an easy course. That is one of the reasons why I from a merely literary point of view delight in the conception of the Jesus of the New Testament. From the very first He would do hard work; He said He would save the world. There are some propositions that glorify themselves by their very boldness. Audacity may be an element and a seal of subdued and holy ambition. The devourer takes an easy course: he suggests doubts; he says, My friend, you take that potion I hold in my hand; it can do you no harm, and it may do you great good; it will cool thee and lull thee and rest your fevered body; you take this; you need not take much at first, or at last; only, take it. The devourer suggests—always does at least when he wishes to be almost pious in the esteem of his victims—that we or they should not do things. It is a negative policy; the tempter whispers that upon the whole it may be

safe not to do this or that. The devil is a coward; he slinks and sneaks and hides himself, and comes out at calculated moments and meets lone lives when they are wandering around the garden of beauty, and squats on the shoulder, and whispers this or that,—something easy, tempting, flattering, no harm in it. He never yet said to any loving soul, You have a hard time of it, and I have come to help you. He loves no man, therefore do I with some hot iron, plucked from his own fire, brand him, and send him out with the disfiguring stigma upon his cruel face. Nothing is easier than to destroy, to devour, to consume. How long did it take men to build the minster or the abbey? The abbey took two hundred years to build; give me one half ton of gunpowder or one barrel of dynamite and I will blow it to pieces in a night. Is it possible to blot out the work of two centuries in an hour or two or in one dreary night? Yes, it is quite possible; there is nothing so easy as to destroy, and that is the part which the devil has undertaken, because he is a coward, an utterly mean soul. But he would not destroy an abbey, a minster, a sanctuary made beautiful by art? Yes, he would destroy it; he hates all beauty, he loathes the morning star, he would gladly pluck the star of the evening from its setting and crush the jewel under his cruel foot. To destroy, therefore, I repeat, is the easy course.

That is how the devil succeeds so often with young and trustful souls. He says he loves them, he can greatly comfort and enrich them, he can satisfy their ambition, and he can make the way up the steep quite easy, and the young soul will find at the top of the ascent everything—throne and crown supremacy, dominion, and rest, and honour, and as for riches, they are to be had not for the asking, but for the taking, and taking such riches is no burglary; and he says to the young soul, Come! as if inviting the young soul to a festival on the top of the sunny mountains. My son, if sinners, or the devil, entice thee, consent thou not. Nothing is easier than to disfigure. Go to the academy, and in its proudest moment you can spoil the whole of it; you can either set fire to the picture, or you can dip the

broad brush in some liquid that will almost immediately erase the proudest figure and the sunniest landscape, so that before the evening men would say, Where is the academy? Gone, devoured, disfigured, destroyed. It is the same way with character. My young darling soul, there is a lion which will devour men; it may be lust or drink or ambition or meanest selfishness. It means thee no good; it will smile upon thee and lure thee and promise thee anything to get thee out, away from father, mother, and altar, and sacred association that it may destroy thee. Be warned.

There is another passage in this book of Ezekiel which is of the same tone. That passage speaks of men who are "skilful to destroy." We have had that text, we spent a morning long years ago in meditating upon these words,—skilful to take things to pieces, to injure the soul, to make mantraps and soul-snares. There are devils who are experts in the destruction of men; not violent opponents, but eminently skilful, almost artistic. O, they can paint well and plead eloquently and insert the poisoned sting without your feeling the puncture. What is the other class? Endeavourers; and the endeavourer has chosen the hard work. What work has that shepherd chosen who but now took to him his staff and his lamp? He went out: why did he not stay in his own little cottage that dark night and make himself comfortable? Why does he rise and proceed notwithstanding the biting wind and the starless cloud? Because, he says, I have lost one of my sheep, and I must go out to seek it until I find it. That is hard work; therefore it is likely to be good work; it denotes and specifies certain elements and qualities of soul that are more precious than rubies. He will not find warmth in his bed or comfort in his little well-sheltered house; nay, he says, there is one lost, and I go till I find it. That is heroic; that is divine. Whether is easier, to pull down a house or to build it? You could employ quite unskilled people to tear your house to pieces,—Here, men, take it down, blow it up, wheel it away. But to put your house up again requires thought, calculation, endeavour, some sense of proportion, and mute

music, and to make it so beautiful as to be almost a home as well as a house; that requires energy, skill, devotion. Whether is easier, to make a ladder or to make a character? Whether is easier, to tear a ladder to pieces or to build up a manhood? That building up of manhood means culture, real intelligence, noble, manly sympathy; yea, and it means some sense of the divine presence and touch and inspiration; it means nurture, culture, little-by-little service; nothing seen, quite imperceptible for a long time. The husbandman may have lost patience, but when he sees the first green blade pushing through the black earth he takes heart again; he multiplies the little blade of corn into a stalk, into ears of corn, into golden harvests, and he feels almost as if the little pricking blade were itself a harvest in miniature.

Now Jesus Christ always undertook hard work; always gave Himself for the life of the world. Said He on one graphic and ever-memorable occasion, Who hath touched Me? The disciples say, Seest Thou how they throng and press upon Thee, and sayest Thou, Who hath touched Me? of course they have all touched Thee; certainly a great number of people have touched Thee. Nay, said He, one has touched Me, for virtue hath gone out of Me, and I am less a man than I was, and yet more than a man, for the giving has been a receiving and the parting of strength has been an accession of power: who touched Me? Who has the electric hand that plucks virtue from the craspedon of Christ? Some people think all touches are alike; there are persons who think that all voices are alike; they say, We can hear you without your speaking so loudly. They do not understand what music and significance there may be in loudness. We do not want an organ that can just make itself heard; we want to make the walls hear it, to make the roof hear it, and the foundation, and we want to receive from that thrill and uplift a sense of dominance, which is sense of God and His heaven. So many men think they have touched Christ when they have only approached Him with a cold, unbelieving, ceremonial hand. What did Jesus Christ undertake to do? He undertook a work which at once seals His deity. I am tired of hearing many people speak about

the divinity of Christ; that is in some cases a very elastic and unreliable word. I want to hear men say with their hearts that they believe in the Godhead of Christ; that indicates His real nature, His true power, and His indefeasible ability and right to save the world. He who can save the world is God.

What did Jesus come forth to do? He said, I am come to seek and to save that which was lost. Is that easy work? Does that mean a long all-the-year-round holiday? Does that mean fine raiment and abundance of food and overflowing enjoyment, and entering so passionately into the life of the people as to lose your individuality in their commonplace? It does not. To seek and to save the lost is an action which I will not reduce to a dogma, because over dogmas men fight, but I will ask you to consider it for a moment as a conception of power, a possibility in the brain of a madman. O, tell me what does this madman propose to do? He proposes to save the world. Then He is no madman. I proceeded forth and came from God for this purpose, said my Lord and Saviour.

We have in the first instance a devourer of men; in the second instance we have a Saviour of men. Which are we going to follow? which will really do us good? which will talk to us upon the greatest subjects? Let us listen to the conversation of both, and determine by the tone of the conversation which is the devourer and which is the endeavourer or saviour. You can know the moral meaning of a tone; you have nouse enough to detect insincerity even under its most skilful concealment and variety of mood. You know counterfeit coin from the real coin of the realm, and *vice versa*. The heart knows the Gospel. The listener listens after he has been consciously awakened to his bitter, awful sinfulness, and he says to himself, Which of these two men will do me good?—one is a devourer; he says, Do not believe it, never mind the future; this so-called sin is only an invention of certain vague persons and ministries; do not rack and vex your soul about your sin; come away, I will give you a liquid which if you quaff deeply will make you quite a happy man again. No; my heart tells me that you are a liar. What does this man say who is a Saviour? Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are

heavy laden, and I will give you rest: if any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink: I am the way, the truth, and the life: if any man will be My disciple, let him take up his cross and follow Me. O, this is health; there is health in the man's voice, there is health in every offer He makes. He wants to give me relief from my burning thirst, He wants to give me rest, He wants to introduce me to the Father, and He does not lay down easy and tempting terms; the price is the Cross. His discipline proves His theology. Which shall we follow, brethren? Let us make up our minds. The beast is there; your adversary the devil goeth about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and there is nothing so easy as to devour. It required God to create man. A devil can devour him.

ORDER OF SERVICE AT THE CITY TEMPLE ON WHITSUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 3RD, 1900.

Voluntary .. .. "Andante" .. .. *Guilmant*

Anthem 3 .. "O praise God in His holiness" .. *Weldon*

The Lord's Prayer.—*Field.*

Hymn 76 .. "Ye servants of God."

1st Lesson. Joel ii. 28-31.

Chant 74 .. .. Psalm xcii. .. .. *Hopkins*

2nd Lesson. Acts ii. 1-4.

Anthem 82 .. "Lift up your hearts" .. *Barnby*

Solo: Mr. EDGAR ARCHER.

Pastoral Announcements.

Prayer.

Hymn 205 "Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove."

Sermon.

Offertory and Solo:

"O Jesu, I have promised" .. .. .. *Hubert C. Oke*

Miss LUCIE JOHNSTONE.

Hymn 481 "My God, and is Thy table spread?"

Benediction and Threefold Amen.—*Gounod.*

Voluntary .. .. "Communion" .. .. *Wely*

CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

PRAYER.

WE bless Thee for this Pentecost. May the power of the Spirit dwell in us and be upon us; may there be a glow and a brightness as of heavenly fire round about our life. May we be known by fire; may men be assured that we have been with the Holy One because of the glow that is in our hearts and the fervent charity which makes our lives felt as a great and gracious power. We bless Thee for the Holy Spirit, the unseen, yea, the invisible never to be seen, always to be felt, — a great Presence in the heart and life, giving us joy and peace in believing, and raising our Christian character to its supremest point. We thank Thee for the Holy Ghost as the interpreter of Christ; He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us; He does not speak of Himself, whatsoever He hears that does He report to our souls, so that we are kept in touch with heaven and with the eternal counsel. O wondrous privilege, ineffable delight, heaven begun! O that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they might know that all things grow up from the visible to the invisible, and thus return to their source. We have stopped intermediately and befooled ourselves by worshipping the things that are seen; we have mistaken bigness for greatness, and nearness for importance; we have not seen the Lord with the eyes of purity, with the heart of tenderness, and with the spirit of love. We have beheld the outside, and have made an idol of it, yea, a graven image, and a thing to be bowed down unto. We have heard the gentle voice, the spiritual music, saying unto us, God is a Spirit. But we have not received the gospel; we still look at things visible, and touch the things we can lay our hands upon, and we are as fools before God. Men have sought to build Thy temple of wood and of stone and of things that could be appraised in plain figures; they will not hear the sweet, tender spirit which says, The kingdom of heaven cometh not by observation, by ritual, and ceremony, and church-going, and altar-building, but is a great mystery of the heart, a wondrous kingdom absorbing the whole life, and turning its love into sacrifice and service for others Pity us, Thou God of mercy; we have clothed our nakedness, and we have

thought we could clothe God also. Thou didst intend us to be simple and true and beautiful, pure and flowerlike through and through, but we have debased ourselves and brought a manhood to Thee that requires Thine own blood to redeem. O the pity of it and the heart-soreness! God be merciful unto the foolish men that have misrepresented the kingdom of God, and have not known that it is invisible, ineffable, eternal. Amen.

LXXXIV.

SPIRITUAL DIVERSITY.

PREACHED ON WHIT-SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 3RD, 1900.

"*The vessels being diverse one from another.*"—ESTHER i. 7.

AT the great feast vessels of gold were given to the dazzled guests. It was a great feast: "When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days." Then the king made a feast unto the people. He did not care who came; he was in a lavish mood, and said, Let everybody take what he wants. And there were given to the guests to drink vessels filled with wine, vessels of gold. Silver went for nothing; and the vessels were diverse one from another, no two alike, the kind of thing that pleases men in their low estate. To think that no two vessels were alike!—there was wonder, there was glory. Poor things! O sad and heart-wearing to live within the cackle and the noise of such poor creatures! As if this were something new, as if the king had hit upon an original idea and were the patron of great novelties. O the pity of it and the heartache! As if this were something new! Why, this was from the beginning of the creation. There is another King that has no two cups alike, that has made or created millions upon millions of cups and vessels, and never repeated the plan. But who would think of going to God for originality? We go to the shop windows for the latest novelties. That

God should have allowed such creatures to prowl about His universe! No two grassblades are alike. Things that seem to be identical are diverse one from another, and we never see the diversity; nay, some hearts are so made that they would constitute this as a charge against God, that He does not repeat the same thing, but makes sameness into variety, and monotony into great delights of music. It is so terrible to live with the vulgar. Through and through the whole economy of God as we know it by revelation, observation, and experiment, the great principle of novelty prevails.

What wonderful things we read about this in the New Testament! Who would ever think of going to the New Testament for anything original? But the time will come when Jesus will have His turn. I find that the other originals grow stale; custom stales their finite and abominable and miscalled variety. Jesus Christ has no two vessels alike in His beautiful palace-church. When He went up on high, "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers . . . till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." No two Christians alike; and they do not understand this, and therefore they get into controversy and build themselves up into little sects and denominations. We must recognise the sovereignty of God in all this variety. That is the thing we neglect to do. "All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds"; and God can go on through all eternity making all these over again without any reference whatever to what we ourselves have seen and catalogued. Poor man! he can catalogue his originalities. "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory." Now where is Ahasuerus and his palace and his feast and his little cups that are diverse one from the other? Yet you

hear more of the king than you hear of God, and you speak more of the king than of God; though you drink His sacrament and drench yourselves with His blood, you never mention His name six days a week. O the unutterable sadness of it! No two blades of grass are alike. They seem to be alike, but there are instruments that can detect differences. Yet we pine for something new and stretch ourselves in lassitude, we who might live in the innermost places of the palace of God, we who might see the blood flowing through all the veins of all the little summer flowers; for all blood is red if we can see it aright, and the flowers are full of blood.

The text is, "The vessels being diverse one from another." There is a principle in this statement; let us find that principle, and fear not to apply it. No two men are alike. Yet we speak of men as if they were one. They are one, but not in likeness. The root lies deeper than the appearance; the root is unity, the evolution is variety; but the variety does not destroy the unity. The great thing to be done is to realise unity in diversity, and diversity in unity. Why judge one man by another? I suppose it is one of the small entertainments which a man can have at small expense. You cannot praise one without trying to dispraise some other man. This is our rule of criticism, and we call it judgment by relativity, criticism by relation. Man is fond of making words like relativity. A man might lounge in his armchair with some sense of having deserved it after making a word like relativity. So we cannot exalt Paul without depressing Apollos, and if we say a word in favour of Apollos we almost instantly withdraw it by saying that in many respects he is quite inferior to Cephas. Why not judge the man by what he is, and let the other man alone? Why say that this or that man is very noble, but he is an inch shorter than another man who lives over the hill? What do we want with that other man at this moment? We do not know him, we do not ask for him; why not take a man just as he is, and thank God for him? That would never do; all things would then be so dull; there would be no spunk in conversation if we could not reduce

somebody. To this, O Christ, has redeemed manhood come, that it cannot praise the sun without insulting the moon!

There are no two sins alike. No two men sin in just the same way. Wherein is the satisfaction or the subtle delight? It is in this, that I can thank God that I do not sin as my neighbour sins. There is some originality about my iniquity, there is no originality about the other man's iniquity. He who is strong at one point seeks to magnify his strength by comparing it with the weaknesses of other men. We do not like to sin as other people sin. One man can sin broadly, roughly, and with some sense of publicity and dominance, as if he defied the eyes of critics. Him we deem very coarse clay; we leave that man in the hands of the police, and we who left him in the hands of the police sin on the sly. We keep the Sabbath by drawing down the blinds and drinking whiskey behind them. But that is not vulgar; that is well-guarded sin, and we wipe our lips with a red-hot hand and look out behind the blinds to see if anybody is breaking the Sabbath. We are all sinners, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; all we like sheep have gone astray, only every one in his own way and according to his own taste and fashion; but the thing to be recognised is this, that we are all sinners, one as big as another and as guilty and as red-handed and as deeply in need of the Cross. It will be a long time before we can get the people to believe this, and therefore a long time before the Gospel can make any real progress in the world; because men will draw sin in various lights and shades, men will draw sin gradedly, little step after little step; and one man will be very proud if his grey is not as dark as another man's black. Put them, grey and black, right in the front of the white-faced sun at noonday, and tell me whether the sun can distinguish between the one and the other or will permit any broad and vital distinction to be made. Judging ourselves by ourselves, we are respectable; one man is a magistrate on the bench, and another man is a prisoner in the dock,—and in God's sight they may be both in the dock. What is the dock? who made it? who had any right to make it? And what is respectability?

—is it the texture of a coat or the quality of a character? It is when we get into these religious places, into these innermost sanctuaries, where the eternal lamp burns in continual beauty, that we begin to see that we are all sinners. There is none righteous, no, not one. It is enough to make a man think of suicide to see the smug sinner in his velvet condemning the poor homeless sinner on the open street doing his sin in the sight of the sun. We want the inner criticism. No two sins are just alike; they are various in measure if not always various in quality, and are to be judged by the temperament of the men. When all is known much may be forgiven. Who knows all? What a life you have had! Maybe I speak to some poor stranger friend. The drink curse has been in your family for scores if not hundreds of years, and you are the last representative of a genealogy of drunkenness; and men turn up their faces and turn away their smile from you because you are reaping a harvest which other men sowed in years far-gone. Good God, Thou gentle One, full of mercy, full of tears, Thou knowest how it is that I have come to be so bad a man. Pity me! for the Cross still stands in the Calvary of Thy memory.

Men believe in different ways. We are not all equally gifted in faith. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye." You have been made strong that you may help the weakness of other men. Do not boast of your greatness and your orthodoxy, your Pharisaic pride and pomp; but wherein the Spirit of Christ has laid hold on you and made you very strong in faith and mighty in prayer, remember that you are trustees of these abilities and privileges, that you may use them for the sake of the poor, the outcast, and the weak. Who uses his strong faith in that way? There are some men who are gifted with a nose for heterodoxy, with a nostril that can smell heretical doctrine across a sea. Poor creatures! I would myself shut them all up in prison and feed them on bread and water until they cried for mercy because of their hard-heartedness towards men who were struggling with doubt, crying in bitterness of soul, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief. I have seen a spiritually minded man expelled from a Christian assembly because he could not

pronounce the shibboleth of that gathered throng of nominal Christians. When he had been voted out, the assembly seemed to fall into complacency, as if it had done a great duty, and the learned, noble, benevolent, devout soul was left, so far as that gathering was concerned, to go to the devil. But God heard that they had cast him out, and met him at the door, and gave him sunshine, a year's value of light for one short day. Be sincere, earnest, through-and-through men of God, and no matter who casts you out. Let casting-out be the last work of the Church. It is our business as representatives of Christ to keep as many in as possible, and never to put one out unless forced by an irresistible compulsion. That would be heaven.

It is easy to add, but most necessary, that men work in different ways. The vessels of gold are diverse one from the other even in this matter of work. But if you do not work in my way what becomes of you? When will people let other people alone? when will they recognise individuality of conscience? when will they give men credit for doing the very best according to their ability? If I am a Sunday-school teacher, and you do not teach in the Sunday-school, consequently I expel you. If I do certain work which you never attempt, of course I suspect you and distrust you. If I do not subscribe to the charities which you support, then of course I must be a ridiculous and intolerable character. When will we remember that the vessels of God are diverse the one from the other, that each man must be himself and work in his own way according to his own ability; remembering all the time not to make himself offensive to people who work along other lines and policies? Read the sixteenth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans for a specimen of the discriminating judgment. See how he handles the case with a master's handling. He mentions those who labour in the Lord, and then he mentions and sends salutations to others who labour "much" in the Lord, and that "much" split up the Church. Why should these people be said to labour much in the Church while I am only said to labour in the Church? I consequently never speak to these people.

And shall it be said without fear of giving offence

that no two men preach alike? Let us thank God for that! If all men preached alike, nobody would go to church. We live by diversity, but our delight should be to turn our diversity into unity without destroying the diversity – a moral miracle, indicative of the presence of the grace of God in the heart ruling with sovereign power. One saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; and another, I am of Cephas. Was Paul crucified for you? That is the determining question. The man who has suffered for you ought to be most valued. Not the man who has amused you or titillated you, but the man who has in a well understood sense laid down his life that he might help you; that is the man, whether of this nation or that, whether of one creed or of another, who deserves to be hailed and blessed as an apostle of the Cross. We have often had occasion to remark upon a foolish criticism which the world cannot really shake off. We speak of a minister or preacher, and describe him as "without the learning of Pusey," "without the rushing rhetoric of Melville," "without the extemporaneous epic power" of the man on this side of the river or on that side. Suppose that this poor unfortunate man should be as learned and as polished and as eloquent and as rhetorical and as critical as all other men, he would want a pulpit seven times the size of this to hold even part of him. Why can we not take the individual gift and say, Blessed also be God for this holy and winning speech? and why not recognise the sublime fact that all ministers are needed to make up the ministry? Then should we have more charity and more appreciation and more sympathy. There are diversities of operations, but the same Spirit.

Now this gives us the right idea of unity. The Church may be united, though it may appear to be superficially divided. In my judgment, and I make this the basis of my teaching, the Church of Christ is united. When people are talking about the reunion of Christendom, I do not understand their foreign language. Christendom was never divided, except in a nominal, formal way, in a way quite mechanical. It has never been divided so long as it has held to the Christ. It is not the creed, but the

Christ that unites men in one massive and indestructible Church. We must allow each other his way of looking at things. Every man must read the Bible according to his own capacity, his own intelligence, and his own opportunity. The point at which we are united is not in our commentaries, but in our inquiry and searching into the mystery of the divine word. If we are all really in quest of the revelation, we shall soon see that merely literary and scholastic questions adjust and determine themselves. All the denominations are one, yet no two of them are alike, and they are utterly diverse one from another as to framework and purpose and methods of doing things. Find the unity in the Christ, not in the formula or the ritual. When this idea is fully realised the churches will have great rest. We are appointed to different functions, we are gifted in different degrees and measures; but there is one Lord, and He must judge and settle all. What did you think of that music? Well, I liked the clarionet best. But the clarionet is not a band; you want to pick out little whistles and constitute each whistle into a band or an orchestra. That is the little mischievous trick that we are about. No one instrument is a band; no one instrument is all instruments: no man is all men, and no child of the family of seven is the whole family. Why not look at things in their proper units? There may be a thousand units, and all the units may be required to consolidate one unity. Love the band, the great torrent of eloquence; be thrilled by the united instrumentality and the united vocalism of the entire performance; receive the whole and speak of the whole in its totality, not in its broken fractions. Let us speak of man in the same way.

What a brotherhood there would be amongst us if we all recognised this principle! No two experiences are alike. We are at liberty to talk one to another, but we are not at liberty to judge one another in this matter of spiritual experience. I remember spending many cloudy and stormy days in my teens when I unfortunately got hold of a book called "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," by John Bunyan. It was a book that had been misunderstood; let that

be said in justification of Bunyan's memory. He depicts himself in that book as worse than the worst sinner that religion had ever dreamed or imagined, and I thought I had to pass through all that heart-searching and heart-breaking, and I did not feel that I had, outwardly at least, been so vile and detestable a character; and therefore I felt as if I could not repent in the right way. So I stood outside the gate crying bitter tears because I had not sinned according to the magnitude and quality of another man's transgression. You must live your own life; you must measure your own environment. Education, parentage, a thousand opportunities and ministries enter into the complicated question of condition and environment. There are some before me who do not need to pass through what Bunyan represents himself as having passed through. You have had godly parents, you have seen piety at home, you have been gradually, gently led by green pastures and still waters. The opening of your religious life has been more like a dawn than an earthquake, or some tempestuous action of the sea. You seem almost to have grown up in an atmosphere of prayer, and you wonder to hear that anybody can be irreligious, you are surprised that anyone can keep outside Christ's sanctuary. I do not expect you to pass through the same experience that Bunyan passed through, but I want you to love the Saviour. "A flower, when offered in the bud, is no vain sacrifice."

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Father of mercy, God of grace, may we join the whole company of heaven in praising and magnifying Thy holy name. Behold, this will do our souls good; we shall thus be lifted up above the wind and the dust and the cloud, and see the fair land, the birthland of summer. If we groan in great heaviness of heart, Thou knowest why; if our heads are bowed down as if seeing below the ground we stand on, as if in search of the grave for that which is there, Thou knowest why we come on the first day of the week, early in the morning, to find the Lord wherever He may be found. We thank Thee for all angel voices that say when we look into the grave, He is not here, He is risen; He is amongst all vitalities, Himself the most vital of all. May we hear the angel voices and respond to the celestial music. We thank Thee that now and again we do see somewhat of the light with which Thou art robed; in God there is no darkness, as there is no death. Yet sometimes we are afraid, and we are seized as if by a great shock, and, behold, we cannot recover ourselves, for the tempest is hard against us. Then we know not God, nor do our hearts consider how great the Lord is, and how gentle and how full of tenderness and tears. May we always have the right view of our Father, may we know that God is love. We have cried out because Thy bolts have pursued us, and there was no refuge, and we have cried on the hillside because we could not screen ourselves from Thy sheets of rain. Yet all the while Thou wast seated above us in love and tenderness and daily care, and we knew it not. The Lord pity us because of our blindness, because of our atheism even in the midst of our prayers. We know not the truth as it is, we do not touch the eternity of God; we are poor, sunken, because sinful, depraved, and lost; we are not the men Thou didst make us: pity us in our grievous fall! When there was no eye to pity and no arm to save, Thine eye pitied and Thine own arm brought salvation; and now and again we have a great living consciousness that though we had gone astray we have returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. We bless Thee for a high experience, for a broad and brilliant religious outlook; we thank Thee for those tidal times of faith

wherein we have no fear, no doubt, no hesitancy, but are in very deed, in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, the sons and daughters of God. Thou hast given us bread, and we thought we grew it in our own fields; Thou hast given us wine and oil and an abundance of summer fruits, and we heeded not the Giver. The Lord pity us, for it is the evil nature that rises against the good. Wherein we have been mean and miserly, God's love forgive us if it can; wherein we have been quarrelsome and evil-disposed, fretful, altogether out of good keeping and out of good conduct, the Lord pity us, for we make fools of ourselves seven times a day. Wherein we have been hard upon any human creature, the Lord soften our hearts, and say unto us, With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged. If any man have a quarrel against any, may the oldest be the first to forgive, and may the youngest sue for pity. Thou knowest how short our day is, how near is the rising of the evening star. May we then, gathering together in the time of the shadows, know how God has been good to us all the day, and may we fall into each other's arms of forgiveness and comradeship and brotherhood, and thank God for the Cross that has redeemed the world. Amen.

LXXXV.

THE MASTER KEY.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 10TH, 1900.

"*God is love.*"—1 JOHN iv. 8.

WHAT is the Bible in one sentence? What is theology in one breath? There may be words enough, a thousand thick on every page; and yet there must be one living sentence somewhere that will contain and suggest and glorify the whole. What is that sentence? Some of us are not prepared to take the Bible as a whole, it is too much for us, written by so many scribes at so many different times that we have not mental training enough to grasp the whole question at once. Is there not a little Bible, Bible of bibles? Cannot you find one sentence that gathers up all the other sentences into itself? We

have it in the text, "God is love." That is the Bible. Why should you and I, imperfectly trained and very infirm in intellectual compass and grasp, attempt to sit upon high judgment seats, and take in the whole Bible, and pronounce upon it with the authority and fluency of ignorance? This is the little Bible, or the sum-total Bible; this is the seed that holds all the trees of Eden, all the oaks of Bashan, and all the cedars of Lebanon. Why should you and I permit ourselves to be the victims of people who are altogether impossibly clever and who have undertaken to settle everything about the Bible in its totality? I want my little Bible, my all-containing Bible, my one pregnant sentence; enough for me; all the notes of music come out of that one tone. Give me a Bible that I can carry with me in the memory of my heart; give me a Bible that will interpret all the rest of the Bible, making it perfectly simple and clear and credible. Strange it is, and foolish to innocent insanity sometimes, and to criminal insanity in other instances, that men who cannot really read the Word—Hebrew, Greek, Chaldaic, Syrian; what you please—should undertake to have an opinion! My lords, think of the idiots! I want some miniature Bible, I want a star that holds all the other stars in some mysterious way. Here it is in the text; it has been waiting for us all these years, and we have never really read it aright. "God is love." That is the master-key, if I may change the figure, that wonderful key that can open any door, that one key that can open seven locks at once. Until we get hold of the master-key we shall have little infidels and small tom-thumb unbelievers, who want to stretch themselves into things much bigger. Get the master-key, and all will be well. There is a pass-key or a pass-word, an open sesame, a talismanic touch, or look or sign, and all things fly open, and seem to say in their opening, Come, and welcome; the fields are yours, and the palace is your sanctuary.

Here is all we want. Here we have three words, which are three syllables, and they are bigger words than all the piled words of the most elaborate dictionary ever constructed. These are the words out of which all the other words come. No man invented this word. It has become so familiar now that we

do not know its meaning; but if we could throw ourselves back mentally and spiritually to the right standpoint, we should know that it did not lie within the compass of human genius to invent any of these words. We take the words for granted; we speak the word *God* as if we knew all about it, and the great verb *am*, *is*, as if it were one of a dozen verbs of equal merit; and *love*, which the boldest lexicographer has never successfully defined, we roll glibly off the tongue. We have all things in three syllables. Here is the Bible reduced to the smallest possible verbal scale, and yet losing nothing of the stellar glory and the infinite compass of the evolution of the Divine idea.

The use of this text is not to be found in its own verbal exposition. This is a text that is to be carried all over the Bible; this is the commentator of the whole Scripture. Turn over a page—where is the lamp? That is Bible reading. You fail to expound the Scripture because you have lost the lamp. Do not suppose, then, that "God is love" is a text that can be explained in one discourse or explained in all the discourse ever poured from the fluent tongue of eloquence. Never read a chapter without lighting the lamp and putting it just over the chapter you are reading. What is your lamp? "God is love." Good! now read on, and all things will give up their secret at the touch of the gleam of that magic lamp. You have been bewildering yourself, have you, about the authorship of this and that book, about the continuity and the apparent self-contradiction of some of the historical writings, have you? Did you read the whole under the light of the lamp? You are not sure, but I am sure, because if you had taken the lamp with you, you would have seen everything, or have been enabled so to treat it as to take away all the intellectual hostility and all the moral perplexity!

The lamp! We might take it with us now and look at a few passages in the light of this gleaming candle of God. Take this awful text: "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." He threatens the man whom He has made! He does not. The lamp! now read under the light of the

lamp, and you will find that this is no threat, this is no uplifting of the arm of Jehovah, as who should say, Take care what you are about, or one mistake on your part and you are a dead man. God never learned that savagery of tone; God speaks in another music. These were hard words, no doubt, to the man who heard them for the first time. Why speak to a man almost on his first day of conscious manhood about dying? why begin with foreign languages? Yet, properly read, it is the language of love, and that is never foreign; it is the tender language of solicitude. When you point out to your dear little child that if he goes into a certain place he will be injured, you are not threatening the boy; we cannot say, Why speak to the dear little boy in that tone? You properly reply that the tone is an expression of solicitude, anxiety, tenderest love, saying in all the music of the parental heart, Take care! if you go down there you will be perhaps injured, something may meet you there that will frighten you; if you once go into that den or jungle where the wild beast is you will be torn to pieces: take care not to go in that direction. That is not threatening; that is loving, caring-for, going-out-after, with tender desire and anxiety. So I take my lamp text, "God is love," and hold it all above the story of Eden, and behold, I know that God has made all things good and designed all things in love, and that the very voice of warning is a new accent in the music of sweetest, tenderest care.

Let us hold the lamp over another text that is almost too terrible to read. May I read it in a genteel assembly? shall I not be hissed out of the pulpit I degrade if I read this text?—"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." I admit that it is possible so to utter these words as to import into them a false meaning and a false tone, but I insist that it is also possible so to read them as to make them about as tender words as can be found in the whole compass of inspired revelation. This is not wrath, it is pleading, it is the expression of solicitous love: as who should say, My dear soul, do you really know what wickedness is? do you know what it means, what it involves, and what it really

must come to in the bitter end? No, I thought it was a philosophical question. It is not; it is a question of moral harvest, moral issue, a question of the inevitable. Do you know what it is to be wicked? I have studied moral philosophy. You will not find it there. Where can I find it? Mainly in your own heart, in what is called consciousness, self-consciousness, self-analysis, deep self-knowledge. No mere system of philosophy ever eventuated in such a proposition as that "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." That was only found out in the most agonising moment of human tragedy. No man ever invented that saying; he had not mental compass and strength to invent it or to express it. You must live some texts if you would get at their meaning. Here, then, God is not in a petty fume, He is not, as we should say in human terms, shaking His fist above the human race and saying, I will have you! depend upon it, you shall come to ruin for this. There is no such tone in the divine voice. The Bible is a book of tender music, generous, strenuous warning:—My child, take care; if sinners entice thee, consent thou not; if they make thee big promises, saying, There is much gold in this; come, toss the dice; there is a fortune in this trick, consent thou not; for this house goes down to the pit, and this wickedness spends its holiday in hell: O don't, don't! let me throw mine arms around thee; son of my heart, consent thou not. It is a father pleading with the son, it is not a father threatening the son; and the son would have a right to say, if he were not so warned, You never told me of this, you never gave me a hint of what this would come to, you kept silence when you knew I was being seduced and tempted by a thousand malign influences, and you never spoke a word about hell or the pit or the endless fire. That would be an accusation to be hurled at the head of the father. So here, in one of those so-called rough imprecatory passages, wherein God is supposed to be very wrathful and very stormy, here, we find the very heart of love; in the midst of all this warning there is one large tender tear that wets the cheek of God. Do not believe those persons, therefore, who point out the imprecations and denunciations, and wish you to believe that all

these things are indications of the wrath of God. Hear me, they are not; they are indications of the love of God; God in His mercy thinks it right to tell us what the harvest of sin-sowing is, and if He had never told us, how could He judge us? and if He had never told us and attempted to judge us, what a standing-ground we would have for self-vindication, how we might charge Him with injustice for having kept back the secret of the evolution of moral processes. We go to the judgment with our eyes open, we go to perdition with the Scriptures written in plainest language of entreaty and love.

The lamp! What is this?—"It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you." "God is love." He does not judge promiscuously or indiscriminately; there is not one lot for all; if a man has begun with much, much will be required of him, and if he has begun with little, he will be judged accordingly. The heathen man who never heard of the Christ is nearer heaven than the man at the high end of London town who has been brought up in the Church, who has been trained under the very shadow of the altar, and has heeded none of these things, but has deliberately hurled them back in the face of God and said, I will not have Thee to reign over me. The little child who has never seen a real living blade of grass will not be judged like the child that has been born in luxury and who could take a long walk around his father's estate, and who yet has despised the goodness of God and never suffered it to lead him to repentance. They cannot be judged alike. Jesus Christ has laid down this law; He says, There is not one judgment for all, there is a judgment for each; all the circumstances will be taken into account, all the environment will be calculated and set forth, and will be treated as an element or a factor in the great judicial process. If the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon they would have been on their knees centuries since; having sinned away the greater mercies, you have dug the deep hell.

Take another passage. I am endeavouring to vindicate the goodness of God in passages that appear to be

somewhat terrible and somewhat opposed to what we regard as the true nature and quality of a Divine Being. Here is a prophet who is about to be sent forth, and the Lord gives him His prophecy before sending him out, and He says to the prophet, "Say to the wicked, It shall be ill with him." Is that a threat? It is not. By reading it in a loud and strident tone you have missed the music of the message. This instruction might have been whispered to the prophet; it might have been whispered with a voice choked with tears. O tell the fool that he is an enemy to himself; it will not be ill with him because I determine it so to be, but because of the very necessity and philosophy of the case: men cannot gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles; there is a harvest law, there is a marvellous process of cause and effect, incoming and outgoing, a wonderful reciprocal action between the outward and the inward. Say to the wicked—take him aside, take him to thy very heart, O thou prophet of heaven—and say to him, Man, it shall be ill with thee if thou dost fight against God; my son, why kick against the pricks? He who fights lightning loses the battle; he who would upset the moral and spiritual system of the universe is bringing down upon himself a stone which will grind him to powder. O tell him—say—arrest him by name, plead with him, tell him, God is love.

So I come back to my little Bible, my three syllabled Bible, the Bible that holds all the Bible. When I come upon a great and awful mystery I call for the lamp, and it has a way of throwing its beams down into the deepest cavities. I have held it over the grave. This epigrammatic sentence fits all graves, it fits all cemeteries; it is the word that is written on the portals of the churchyard, "God is love." I have seen a strong man reel over his son's grave as if he would plunge himself into it, for there was nothing worth living for after that one boy had gone. He was not in a mood to hear any preaching, he was not in a condition to hear even the gentlest tone; he must be watched, we must wait for him, he must feel it like a man before he answers it like a man. It will be no use speaking to him to-day; he sups sorrow; nay, he does not sup it, he gulps it, he drains the dish of

grief at one great gulp. We must call upon this man to-morrow; we must be remote, we must learn in God's grace how to touch a wound without hurting it. Next week perhaps we may meet him, and even then we must hold ourselves remote, and yet be near at hand, and when the lull comes, the only sentence the man can bear, and at first he may receive it with unbelief and partial scorn, is, "God is love." It does not seem like it. No, it does not. I feel inclined to deny it. I do not wonder; your grief is exceeding great; but—God is love. Who says so? I do. On what authority? My own experience; I have dug a grave as deep as you, and I thought just as you are thinking now; I said there are a thousand happy families, and one of the children might have been taken, but I had only one. That was a thousand strokes in one laceration, and I, brother in grief, fellow-mason in tears, I say, God—is—love. Let us meet again when we are both quieter.

From THE BRITISH WEEKLY, *June 14th*, 1900:—

I have never seen a congregation more moved under Dr. Parker's preaching (writes a correspondent) than during the delivery of his sermon last Sunday morning. He is continually surprising his hearers by new glimpses of divine truth and new applications of Scripture. On Sunday morning his text was "God is love," and these three words were used as a lamp in the light of which difficult passages in the Bible were read. Instances were given, the last relating to death. As he hinted at his own experiences the emotion of the congregation deepened, and became almost uncontrollable, when, having said, "I have dug a grave as deep as you, yet I can still say, 'God——'" there came a painful pause, so prolonged that it seemed the sentence would remain unfinished. When at last Dr. Parker recovered himself and completed the quotation, a great many people, men and women, had their handkerchiefs to their faces.

PRAYER.

LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, if we tell the story of Thy goodness where shall we begin or end? Thy mercy is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Thee, and to those that call upon Thy name Thou art all attention, loving, generous attention, forgiving sin, receiving penitence, and returning prayers back in multiplied blessings. Let all the houses of history cry, His mercy endureth for ever. There is no counting Thy mercies; Thy lovingkindnesses are more than the sands upon the seashore. Verily God is love; there is no limit to Thy compassion and Thy care; because Thy compassions fail not we are here to day, living witnesses to the loving care of the living God. Again and again Thou dost remind us by Thy love of Thy great majesty, and Thou dost remind us of Thy great majesty by Thy tears, Thy tenderness, Thy more than motherly compassions. Behold, we are here before Thee to worship God, to call mightily upon His name, and to show as it were by the shedding of our blood that through Jesus Christ our Lord there is no limit to our obedience and to our joyous, grateful service. Amen.

LXXXVI.

MISTAKEN VIEWS OF RELIGION.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, JUNE 7TH, 1900.

"*But he said, Ye are idle, ye are idle; therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord.*"—EXODUS v. 17.

HAT was Pharaoh's rough-and-ready and foolish estimate of religious aspiration and service. In this matter Pharaoh lives to-day. There are many people who cannot understand the utility of religion; they think religious people are always going to church, and no good comes of it. We must put up with these things; we have to bear many reproaches, and this we may well add to the number without really increasing the weight or the keenness of the injustice. Pharaoh said, Ye are idle, ye are idle; I will lay more burdens upon you; so you want to go and pray, do you? I will see to it! it is because you are lazy men that you pretend to want to go and do sacrifice to the Lord; I see through you, you cannot deceive Pharaoh, I know the meaning of your hypocrisy; I will have more bricks out of you, and you shall have no straw, and I will punish your religion by making you do more work in the brickfields.

Sometimes great men are mistaken, and sometimes they are unwise, and at no time do they really comprehend, if they be outside of it themselves, the true religious instinct and the true meaning of deep religious worship, ceremony, and service. The spiritual has always had to contend with the material; the praying man has always been an obnoxious problem to the man who never prays. The praying man is an enigma. When he hastens to prayer people who do not understand him think that he is hastening to

the indulgence of the downy bed, the feathery pillow; he is calling it worship, but in the soul of it it is nothing but sheer laziness. We have had to bear the reproach of the supernatural; we have had every spiritual word we have ever uttered mocked and thrown back as it were in our very faces, and we shall have to bear the discipline of misconstruction right away down to the end of life's chapter, short or long. That some men should be trusted with the function of criticism—whether of men or books or religious service, or preaching, or what else,—the pity of it is as sore as a wound! They will not hold their tongues, they will not spare their folly; it trickles or it swells into streams, or rises into torrents; it cannot be really helpful. We live under each other's criticism; every man is perfectly sure that the other man is not perfect. The worst of it is that there is so much error at the heart of the criticism, so much want of sympathy and appreciation; the critic is not *en rapport* with the author, speaker, server, actor, whatever the name may be by which the Christian instinct and its operations become known. You cannot really judge a man unless you can see into his very heart; you cannot read the book of an author whom you dislike. I have returned books which have been sent to me for criticism because I did not like the authors, and I could not do the authors justice, and rather than sit behind an inky veil and say something that was perhaps unfriendly, if not even positively hostile, I thought it better to send the book back, and tell the sender of it in the first instance to get somebody to criticise the book who either knew nothing about the author or could really and truly appreciate him. I hold that to be a just course under all circumstances. You cannot be at church unless you are in church, and many persons are at church as a mechanical action who are not in the sanctuary, in the very soul and innermost holy of God's house; they are there in the body, but the soul is away, out of atmosphere, out of touch, and the whole thing may be the perpetration of a great villany. Pharaoh knew nothing about the religion of Israel; he worshipped in other directions if he worshipped at all. He could not understand this longing for the sanctuary, this heart-hunger for the

old psalms and the old way of doing things, this cry of the historic heart. Away! said he, let me hear no more from you; I see through all your hypocrisy; you want to get a day's holiday or three days' march into the wilderness, but I will take care you do not enjoy yourselves after your own fashion; get to your brickfields, and if you want to pray and sacrifice make more bricks. Pharaoh does not speak a strange tongue; it is exactly what is being said to-day. Men cannot rise above their own level. The fool must be a fool though you pass him through a mortar; he will come up again even under the influence of the pestle his old wearisome and burdensome self. Only they know what prayer is who themselves do really and agonisingly pray; only they know what it takes out of a man to go through a religious service who can shed such nerve blood and nerve energy on the same consecrated ground. If we could understand one another better, what an increase of brotherhood there would be, and what a mutual lightening of burdens and dispersion of Christianity! To some people the Apostle Paul was mad. There is a great scarcity of crazy people to-day; they have nearly all become mechanically sane in the sense of having lost their divinity and quenched their force. The great thing in many cases to-day is to say to one another, Sh! The old wind of Pentecost, the old enthusiasm that made the Cross a power, has died down to an annual examination of each other's orthodoxy. Oh the sadness of it! oh the new, new tragedy!

How few of us understand really the sacrifice which is implied in true spiritual worship or service! I am told that it is possible for a man to preach three times on a Sunday: I am inclined to the opinion of John Wesley, one of the greatest philosophers as well as theologians that ever lived; said he, A man may preach once, and may do something a second time, if he preach twice; he can only chatter the third time on the same day. It is nothing to some people to estimate a sermon; they imagine that a man has only to open his mouth and let the bird fly out, and they will say, Well flown! not knowing that he has come up from midnight sanc-

tuaries to proclaim morning gospels. It is an awful tragedy to preach, or to serve the living God with living blood in any form. What a destruction of nerve force! Yet a gentle brother, who married well and did little, called upon me and said that I could easily get down to his "place" after the Thursday morning service and preach at his "place" at three o'clock! He could have done it, and come back again, but then the people never would have allowed him to preach here. Our religious service, whether in the pulpit or out of it, in the press or in the family or elsewhere, is nothing if it be not a sacrifice, a shedding of blood.

So you want to go to sacrifice unto the Lord, do you? you are idle, idle; back to your bricks, and make more bricks, and you shall have no straw, and I will put a thicker thong into the hands of the taskmaster, and I will teach you—I, Pharaoh, king of Cæsars, will teach you — better than to run away from your work under the pretence that you are going to be very religious.

So this opens up the whole subject of work and its meaning, spiritual worship and its signification, heart-sacrifice and its story in red reeking blood. Who is the worker—the architect or the bricklayer? I never hear of the architects meeting in council for the purpose of limiting their hours or increasing their bank holidays. The bricklayer is the worker; so it seems; in a certain aspect he is the worker; but how could he move without the architect? St. Paul's Cathedral or St. Peter's did not move from the bricklayer to the architect, but from the architect to the bricklayer. Who had the worry, the anxiety, the nights' sleeplessness, the weary, solicitous, critical calculation, and thinking and comparing and estimation of forces? It was the architect, who apparently was doing nothing—just walking about in a black coat, and so far as the bricklayer could see he might as well be ten miles off. But bricklayers are not the final court of appeal. Why does not each man occupy his own place with honour and with sincerity and with a true appreciation of the other man's place? In the beginning was the Logos —everywhere; not the mechanic, not the artisan, but

the Logos. What is the Logos? The Word. And what is the Word? The Thought. And what is the Thought? God. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. So by a true analysis we get back into word, scheme, plan, dream, specification, suggestion,—the Logos, Jehovah, Eternity. All the churches that are true came up from God with Edom from Paran, the nameless, from everlasting. Do we, then, mock at the labour that is meaner than the great profound thought? No, indeed; the architect cannot do without the builder, any more than the builder can do without the architect; they are workers together; and this is the true idea of society, each man having his own talent, making his own contribution, working under his own individual sense of responsibility, and all men catching the spirit of comradeship and of union and co-operation, united in the uprearing of a great cathedral, a poem in wood and stone, a house of the living God.

Where is the severe strain felt, in the muscle or in the brain? You can take hold of your muscle. As the blacksmith said to the northern cobbler, showing his great muscle, "Thou cannot grow that upo' water." That is to say, you cannot grow such a thick iron muscle on water; get back to your porter and your whiskey and your other assistants of that kind. Where is the burden felt—on the muscle or on the brain? Who has the hard work to do, the blacksmith or the thinker? I insist that no class of men on the face of the earth can have any right to get together and call themselves invidiously, the working classes. We are all workers, and we are all members of the working classes, and the word working must be redeemed from its unjust limitation; and the prime minister and his gardener must both, each hailing the other as a working man, be glad that the apportionment of capacity and of service is with the living Creator. It is worry that kills a man, whether he be blacksmith or prime minister, whether he be author, merchant, preacher, it is the worry of it, it is the nightmare of wondering how we can get both ends to meet. It is that troublesome action upon the brain that puzzles a poor creature up a rickety pair of stairs how to live on nine shillings a week with five

and sixpence of it to go out in rent; it is the worry, the solicitude, the care, the cancering anxiety; and only they know it who have passed through the process; and the greatest sympathy is due to those who are troubled by many cares, who are beaten and pierced by many solicitudes and anxieties. How are they distributed? All over the human area. Every man has his anxiety; every poor heart has its own special misery; every heart is broken in some way. If we could realise that and constitute ourselves into a brotherhood of sympathy, it would be better for us, and they that are strong would bear the burdens and the infirmities of those that are weak. Do let us understand one another. Jesus had compassion upon all men, because He knew all men,—knew them at the root, knew them at the core, knew them before they knew themselves. "Casting all your care upon Him"—why?—"for He careth for you." Sympathy asks you to allow it to share the burden. If we care for those who are in distress, our service to them will not be a burden, but in some way a delight, and in exercising our opportunity we shall in a high degree know what Jesus did when He carried the Cross that He might save the world.

Insincere religion is idle. People who go to church when they do not want to go—that is idleness, and that idleness will soon sour and deepen into blasphemy. Going because I suppose we shall be expected to go—that is idleness and weariness. That cannot apply to people who come to a Thursday morning service at twelve o'clock in the day; they do not come because they must go or people will wonder where they are. No, they must want to come, they must earnestly desire to be there: hence the delight, the joy of jubilee, to preach to folks who are there because they want for the time being to be nowhere else. Insincere religion—would God we could get rid of it! would God the people who do not want to come to church would stay away! they hinder the kingdom, they hurt the wounds of Christ. Let us be sincere, and defy the world. Decorative religion is idleness. When religion is turned into a mere fad or fancy or something æsthetic, then it becomes idleness, and it entitles itself to the rebuke

of Pharaoh and of Christ. There are people who would make religion into an art; there are some persons who have almost succeeded in turning the pulpit into a profession. I believe there may be found a man here and there, quite an eccentric creature, who would speak about the ministry of Christ, the ministry of all churches, as one of the learned professions. My God, it is not that; whatever it is, it is not that in their evil sense of the words. No man can make a minister, no man can make a poet or a prophet; this is God's work, this is work not made with hands. Man can light a fire in his own parlour stove, but no man can create a Pentecost. Yet the ministry is a learned profession! Thou hast given me the tongue of the learned that I may speak a word in season to him that is weary. There is a learning of the heart, there is a skill of the soul, there is a university of the midnight sorrow and the morningtide sight of God. Do leave God some room in His own Church.

Do we not read further, "Be fervent in spirit, diligent in business, serving the Lord"? Yes, but the expression "diligent in business" in that text is not a commercial expression. "Diligent in business" in that verse has to do with a higher commerce. Those who only read the Bible superficially and in order to forget it, say, Remember the words "diligent in business." If some people would not quote Scripture, it would be a great relief. "Diligent in business" in this text means diligent in spiritual commerce, creating a great business between heaven and earth, a great spiritual sea on which are passing cargoes of spiritual commerce, holding great intercourse with heaven, praying without ceasing, sending out the ship of prayer, expecting the ship of reply. That is diligent in business in the apostolic sense as indicated in this passage. "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" The word business there is not commercial; the revisers of the translation of the New Testament have wisely changed the whole expression: Wist ye not that I must be in My Father's house, about My Father's house: do you not know the true address of the Christian? Wherever the Christ-follower is – in the

kitchen, in the house of commerce, on the thoroughfare, on the sea—he is about his father's house. For the temple of the Lord is no mud hut built of certain dimensions; it is the roofless, the immeasurable, the heavenly.

Now if there are any persons who do make an idleness of religion, let them be rebuked. I am afraid some people do make an idleness of religion. Wherein that can be shown to be true, let it be condemned. Am I too practical a man? Mayhap. Do I cry out for square justice? I hope so. And when I see at eight o'clock in the morning young people dressed up and running about to this church or that chapel, I wonder what the mother is doing at home, and I say in my heart, God forgive you! you have left your own mother to make the bed and get the breakfast, and you are going about to do something decorative. I say the wrath of God is upon you if you are doing what you think is justice on the one hand by doing grievous injustice on the other. If you can say, "This ought ye to have done, and not left the other undone," there I am one with you; but I do not like my mother to be left at home to brush my boots or wash my collar, while I go out to show other people how drunkenly pious I am; I will remain at home with the old mother, and I will help her, so that we can both go presently, both go together, mother and son, and enjoy the delights and the quietness of God's dear house. I should be a persecuting old prophet if I had my way and dare cry out against these things. I long to do it; sometimes in various relations of life all I want to do at the moment is to cry, Shame! and it would be good preaching.

Let us, then, not care what Pharaoh says, but examine our own hearts. The name typified by Pharaoh has given me an opportunity of cross-examining myself, and I will say, Pharaoh, thou thinkest I am idle, and therefore I want to be religious; I wonder if Pharaoh is right; he is a very astute man, he has great councillors about him, he has a great country to administer, and there is a light in those eyes sometimes that suggests that he can see a long way into a

motive. I never thought this would come to pass, that Pharaoh would say to me that I am an idle hound, because I want to go and serve the Lord. Is Pharaoh right? It is lawful to learn from the enemy, and if Pharaoh has fixed his eye upon the blemish in my life, if he does see the hollowness of my heart, well, I will think over what the king says. We may learn some things from heathenism. But if I can, by the grace of God, assure myself that by the Holy Spirit I am really sincere in wanting to go to this sermon, this sacrament, this prayer; if I know through and through, really, that I do want to go and serve God, the gates of hell shall not prevail against me.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee for all Thy love and tender care, for Thy help when we are helpless, and for the light that shone upon us when we thought the whole day was swallowed up in night. We bless Thee for counting us when we thought we were left out of the number. Thy mercy endureth for ever. Behold, Thou dost see in us what we cannot see in ourselves. Why didst Thou redeem us, Thou mighty One, at the price of blood? could no lower sum be made to effect the unworthy purchase? could not silver and gold buy such dead things as we? Yet we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. What dost Thou see in us?—what but Thine own image and likeness, shattered and degraded and despoiled unspeakably, but still there. May we regard Thy view of us as a call to better life, larger labour, more sacrificial obedience and love. We bless Thee for the Book in which all the names are written, and for that other book which is the book of life, the wondrous book in which names are written as it were in red blood; they cannot be blotted out; these writings are the writings of the hand of God. Before eternity Thou didst see us one and all, there is nothing new to Thee, nor is there anything old. Thou seest the whole scheme and purpose of things as existent in the divine mind long before time chimed its fleeting hours. Oh that we might stand in the years that are at Thy right hand, and through the power of the Cross and grace of Christ realise that we are sons of God, children of light, songs of the morning; then there should be no more depression and no more discouragement, and as for death, it would be swallowed up in victory. Amen.

LXXXVII.

OUTSIDE FRIENDS OF JESUS.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, JUNE 14TH, 1900.

"*Whence knowest Thou me?*"—JOHN i. 48.

"I AM not a public man, I take no part in demonstrations, I fly no flag; I am a quiet man; I should have rested under the figtree if I had not been called suddenly and perhaps somewhat abruptly; whence knowest Thou me?" Suppose we wanted to make out a list of Christians, how would you proceed? Imagine that I have by your own consent and appointment been chosen to ask you to furnish me with a list of Christian citizens and their families, how would you proceed? What have you done? have you attempted what I asked you to undertake? show me the result. I have examined all the church rolls and all the baptismal registers, and this I think you will find to be a tolerably complete register of Christian citizenship. Is that the way to get the answer to my inquiry? Who wrote the church rolls, and who had any business to write them? and who wrote the baptismal registers, men or women or children? and who bade the writers undertake their task? Who shall count the flock of God? Men are always endeavouring to do the impossible and sometimes to do the absurd. Make a list of Christians? Only one pen could write that register, and that pen is the pen of God. Who will take the census? Ah me! and who is it that creates quite a little public uproar about taking the religious census? Who can do it? Only in some lame and imperfect way can a scale of figures be drawn up, and that by hands that tremble as they write it, conscious as it were of their own infirmity and inadequacy. Who can count the flock of God? But it pleases man to write out little lists of the

Christian population; it pleases man, little, fussy, fretful man, to be writing out lists and registering statistics and telling us who are good and who are not good. What would some men do if they could not in some way or other take the census? But who can count the flock of God? And who has made us constables that we should watch the church-door and say who shall enter and who shall not enter? And I saw, and behold the books were opened. Then the registers are kept in heaven? Surely so. All the registers? Yes, all the registers. You see those books spread out there? Yes. Well, wait one moment. And another book was opened. Who knows but that another, and another? The registrar is God. The Lord knoweth them that are His; He seals them, and the colour is red.

Jesus Christ was always surprising His disciples by saying to this or that man whom the disciples did not know, Let him come in. The disciples sometimes gave the Master sour looks, yea, looks of distrust and utter unbelief regarding His judgment of these people. They would have turned them away; they turned the children away, and when you turn the children away you turn the mothers away, and when you turn the mothers away you turn the fathers away. They were great at turning away people. Jesus Christ said, Let him come. Lord, what! this man? Yes, this man; let him come. But we know something about him. I know more than you know. Before any Philip amongst you saw this man I saw him, the shadow of the figtree could not conceal him; let him come. If this be done, who knows how many people may be included in the love of Christ that we never thought of in that connection? Who can count the flock of God? See how they pour down the hills, and rise up out of the valleys, an exceeding great host, elect, chosen, foreordained, children of eternity. Yet there are some persons who think they know who are fit to come to the Lord's table and who are not. They are the persons who know exactly how many persons the Church of God can hold. Their temple floor is only so many hundred yards long and so many hundred yards wide, and beyond that accommodation all is outside. Outside what?

Even some of us may be inside and may hardly know it. There is a word of cheer for you this hot noontide in the City of London. We may hardly venture to claim to be inside, yet we may be there; His mercy whom we adore as God endureth for ever. The Lord of the feast will find room for all His guests, and the guests shall be thousands of thousands, squared and cubed up to ever-enlarging numbers,—persons who have never entered into the imagination of sectarian or bigoted minds to conceive as being elect of God. What if at one time we shall wonder rather at the number of the elect than at the number of the rejected, if such there be in a universe the name of whose Creator is Love? The disciples knew who should come on and who should be driven off. They imagined themselves very great and expert disciplinarians:—Master, we saw a man casting out devils in Thy name, and we forbade him, because he walketh not with us. Who could believe it? With "us"! It is dangerous to give some men privileges; it is perilous to entrust some men with honours. They soon set themselves up into an entity called "us." A man may be an almost decent man when he is let alone by himself, but the moment he joins half a dozen other men, where is he? The history of bigotry is a history of ignorance. When we know each other better we shall hasten to each other in confidence and love and mutual and emulous honour, because we are made one not by our own cleverness, but by the redeeming grace and cleansing blood of the Son of God.

Take this very man Nathanael: How do I come to be known and known by name by Thee, Thou new Man? how is it? Jesus knew him before he was born; Jesus knew us all before we were knowable. He never pleaded being an agnostic in relation to us. Its suits our little tiny vehement vanity to be agnostics in relation to God, but God has never been an agnostic in relation to us. Consider that as a conception in poetry, and magnify it beyond all other poetry ever known amongst men. Take it as idealism, transcendentalism, apply to it what flashy name you please, there remains the central fact: in the conception of the Bible we have never been absent a moment from the consciousness and the

love of God. Thus Jesus Christ surprises every one who comes to Him. He mentions the name, refers to family circumstances, quotes some instance of domestic history, recalls to the mind some tender providence. The Lord Jesus works wonderful miracles in reminiscence, so that memory is His first resurrection ground; He blows the trumpet, and dead memory gives up all that it had forgotten even of the love of God and the tender mercy of the Most High, and we see new lights flashing upon the dead past. Nathanael was recognised as "an Israelite indeed." It was Jesus Christ's way; He made much of encouragement. Some of us might have been further on in life if our friends had encouraged us more, spoken to us more kindly, given to us a better view of our abilities, and had said to us sometimes when we were in the deep dark valley, Cheer thee! it will be morning presently; come, come, it is in thee to be a bigger man, yet cleverer, nobler, better; come, no hangdog look, but lift up thine eyes and behold; it is night, but night is the time of stars. So on another occasion Jesus Christ dined with a man chief among the publicans and rich; that was all he was at the beginning of the feast. Wondrous things occur at the supper table of the Lord; when Jesus is your guest He may knight you on the spot; when you entertain such Royalty you acquire ineffable honours, new names, uppermost crowns. What is this man your Master, whom ye call Christ, ought to have known, and what manner of man is this; he is chief among the publicans, he is rich, he tyrannises over the people; your master if he were a good man would not have dined with Zaccheus. And the Lord stood up and knighted him with the sword of heaven, and said, Forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. Dead memories revived, old associations quickened, forfeited privileges restored, man awakened. Zaccheus, thou also art a son of Abraham. Who shall count the flock of God? Give me back that list you wrote. Is the name of Nathanael on it? No. The name of Zaccheus? No. Take it back and count better.

And once Jesus treated men in clumps and groups; He enlarged the unit from individuality to family,

Once He put up so to say a whole family, and said, This is the larger unit; we are advancing from personality or individuality to the family, and by-and-by we shall go to the country, and by-and-by to another country, and on, and on, till all flesh shall see the glory of the Lord. It was His way. And Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus. Have you got these people down on your list? No. Take it back and write it better. Miss Nathanael, an Israelite indeed; miss Zaccheus, a son of Abraham; miss Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, the whole little family of Bethany! Tear up thy list; let God be registrar. So we are speaking now about what we may call the outside friends of Jesus. We are at present not dealing with the esoteric and inward, and if we may so say the special, but we are dealing with people who were never thought of at all in their relation to Christ. As if there could be anybody out of relation to the Son of man! They came from odd places, they came in eccentric ways. One of the outside friends of Jesus was a mere listener, but he listened well, and when the Master had made him an answer, he said with spontaneous, glowing, grateful enthusiasm, "Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth." Have you got that man on your list? No, I have not got that man on my list; I have been to the church rolls and the baptismal registers and the religious census as appointed to be taken by government. And you have missed Nathanael and Zaccheus and Lazarus and the listening scribe! What a poor list is yours! tear it up; it is fit only for the burning. So we are talking, let me say again and again, about the outside and unrecognised friends of Jesus Christ. Shall this man enter into our sanctuary? Yes, he is a member, and his name has been on the communion roll for some years. Is that the reason why he should enter? Yes. It is a poor reason. And there was a ruler that came to Jesus by night. Perhaps he had more time then; *came to Jesus* is the point; *by night* is the accident. Come by day, or by night, and welcome all. We do not expect everybody to come in the broad noontide and to be of the proportions of a giant or the dignity of a hero; we expect every poor heart to come just as it can according to its own pain and conviction of

sin and weariness and sense of self-helplessness. There is only one way to God: there are a thousand ways to Christ. And Joseph of Arimathea, it is well we cannot put him upon the list. Why not? who made you keeper of the list? If God puts him on the list there he must remain, and though we may unanimously—how the poor Church has wrecked itself on that word unanimously!—reject him, you cannot put him out, he is still there, and will recur, and then recede, and then return. If God has chosen him, why bruise your poor knuckles on the eternal granite?

Now let me say there is nothing to be proud of in ignoring the Church. Understand that all these men have not ignored the Christ or stood outside of Him on purpose. They did not exhibit hostility to Him in the case of Nathanael, Zaccheus, Nicodemus. There is room in the Church for all. Let us drop the qualifying word which is often put before the word Church—as the Church of Rome, the Church of England, the Scottish Church, the Irish Church, the Congregational Church, the Nonconformist Church. Oh, when it comes to the higher life and work, take a spade, not a pair of scissors, and cut off all these qualifying terms, whether they go before the noun or after it, and throw them away; they are fit only for the burning. There is a spiritual Church, there is a mystical Church, there is an invisible Church; but I think, if I may trust to my memory for a moment, there are churches enough for every one of us to find a place in somewhere. What an odd man he must be who wants to have a whole church to himself! I think if you were to go carefully through the Church as to its names and divisions and sub-divisions, its unions, synods, assemblies, congresses, and more and more, and then etc., etc., until the whole page is filled with them, I think you might surely find one of them that would give you just the accommodation you are looking for. But if not, then heave out a tub of your own and sail on it. There is no peculiar virtue in a man not belonging to a denomination. He must be very supersensitively and absurdly conscientious, or very degradedly bigoted and self-satisfied, if he cannot find room in England, in Great Britain, in America, just

to unite himself in Christian fellowship to some body of well-meaning and hard-working Christians.

There is no warrant, in the next place, for making the Church exclusive. We ought rather to err, if we err at all, on the side of hospitality and inclusiveness. We ought to be prepared to differ in opinion; we ought also to be prepared to agree in everything but opinion. If I tell you that such and such was your opinion six months ago, you say, Well, a good deal has happened since then. I will join you at the point of stability; I will join you not at accidental and changeable points, but at the point of firmness and everlastingness, and we will tabernacle together in the infinite temple whose name is God-is-love. It was Jesus Christ's way to recognise people that nobody else recognised. He offended the Jews greatly and frequently in this matter. He was the most fearless speaker whose name has been recorded in human history; He was always offending the bigotry, the prejudice, and the ignorance of such. He said, There hath not returned to give glory to God save this stranger. That is the same idea—outside people, unrecognised people, and such people surprising the inside people by acts of gratitude and faithful service. Once the Lord Jesus quite offended a number of people by a parable. He said in what we know as the parable of the Good Samaritan, "And a certain Samaritan came where he was." We do not understand the puncturing force of that expression; there was an insult in it, there was a challenge to the Jews, for the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, and it was a Samaritan of whom Jesus said, "But a certain Samaritan came where he was." The supposedly favourites of God fall back and a stranger was chosen as the jewel of the occasion. All this was adumbrated, wondrously foreshadowed, in that wondrous prayer which Solomon offered at the dedication of the Temple; he said, "And when the stranger——" I thought it was going to be a bigoted temple, a place built for Israel alone; and yet Solomon said, "And if the stranger . . . and the stranger." And the stranger was recognised even before the temple of Solomon, his name is in the decalogue, this wondrous figure

of a man that was coming, coming, coming. And the time shall come when there shall be no strangers; there shall be no more strangers, foreigners, but brothers, sisters, part of the whole family in heaven and on earth. Towards that consummation all history tends; because history is in the soul of it the revelation of God, the outshining and forthgoing of His benign, benevolent, redeeming providence. Get thee home, stranger, outsider, and say thou hast to-day heard a man who declared that Jesus Christ has outside, unrecognised friends, and who told thee that thou might be one of them. Then fall on thy knees and say, God be merciful to me a sinner! Then, having received thy pardon, go forth and testify to Christ, and witness for Him, and find the fellowship with which and with whom thou canst most familiarly, tenderly, and profitably associate.

PRAYER.

WHAT is our life? It is even as a vapour that cometh for a little time, and then vanisheth away. We all do fade as a leaf, and at the best we are as a shock of corn fully ripe, ready to be gathered into the garner; but it is nothing. Our days are threescore years and ten, and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow, for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Thou art training us in the shadow school; Thou art making patterns in the clouds, and showing them unto us; Thou knowest that we are here but for a little while, and Thou dost call upon us in Thy mercy and love to redeem the time, to turn the hours into gold, and to give time what we can of the dignity of eternity. This is Thy call in the soul; it moans in us like a great hill wind blowing from afar, rich with messages, some of sorrow, some of joy. Oh! that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider their latter end, and that they would no longer play the fool, as if they had eternity to waste. May we be wise men, considerers of the time, merchants in buying up the opportunity and turning it to the best account; then when the last call comes, it will be a call to supper, the supper of the Lamb, the feast of the heavens, the banquet of higher, fuller service. Let the young be young as long as they can, and may old age have in it some bloom and touch of youth; but may we know that we have this young-heartedness only because of Jesus Christ, the Child that died for us. We bless Thee every day for Jesus: we call Him with Thine own Word the Morning Star, and we receive Him into our hearts as a pledge that we shall never die; he that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die; yea, if he were dead, he shall rise again and be clothed upon with the robes of resurrection, and belong to a kingdom of priests. For these hopes we bless Thee; we need them every one, for there is enough in the cold earth-air to chill the soul and to drive us back and to quicken our unbelief into a great rebellion. Lord, increase our faith; may we meet life like men, men of God, men of faith, men full of the Holy Ghost. Enable us to trample upon circumstances; may they not overcome us, may we overcome them; this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. When the temperature is low, cold, and wintry, draw very near us, thou Sun of righteousness in whose wings alone we can find healing. When we are in weakness

and sorrow, and when we are living under a great fear which we dare not communicate to the dearest heart we know, then be our society, Thou who sittest up the whole night with those whose hearts are sore. When we are troubled and perplexed the Lord give us power to consider things wisely and well, and to set up a time of balances and measures, so that we be no longer fools in the handling of our own lives. The Lord speak comfortably to those that are bowed down, and to those who are weary of life, and asking many a time in the dark night hours, When will it be morning? For the Lord Christ's sake hear us when we ask Thee to turn our sick chambers into temples and churches and sanctuaries of the Presence. Amen.

LXXXVIII.

THE FADING LEAF.

Preached on Sunday Morning, June 17th, 1900.

"*We all do fade as a leaf.*"—Isaiah lxiv. 6.

THE danger is that we mistake all such texts as commonplace. It is a great peril to suppose ourselves so familiar with any text that we really need no further exposition or application of its inward and spiritual truth. There is no commonplace in such a sentence as "We all do fade as a leaf." It is a text for the day, it is a parable for the hour. Interpreted poetically, it can never be stale. We may pervert the richest truths and treat them as if they were commonplaces, but the blame is in us and not in the truth. I could not but hear this little angel text singing to me ever since I heard that dear Mrs. Gladstone passed away. We cannot account for these visitant singers; we do not know who sends them, but we know who sends them primarily, for every good gift and every perfect gift is from the Father of lights. So the texts come singingly; they do not wait for the audience. The birds in all these June trees never say to one another, Is the audience fully gathered? They care nothing for the audience; they

do not want your audiences and your cheers and your encores; they never ask you for a favour. These June birds sing by laws and impulses and motions over which we have no control, and the psychology of which we could never explain. So it is with the text; it comes at the time, it sings its sweet song of heaven, and then vanishes to make way for some other song-teacher. The text applies to old age that would perhaps rather be gathered to the grave like a shock of corn fully ripe. But what is fully ripe, and who shall say when a life is fully ripe and when it is not? Is there not a ripeness of youth, a ripeness of quality as well as a ripeness of quantity? May not seven golden days be a longer time than seven barren years? These things we must live; let God be teacher, let the Holy Spirit, who makes all the summer the soul can ever know, work His miracle of song and light and completeness.

I think we should notice lives that pass from our poor eyesight — persons who have been great as women, wives, mothers, healers, and who have made the world-house worth living in. O man, thou art a clumsy fool compared with any woman that knows how to handle a house without fussing about it. We are so tempted to run after the romantic, the spectacular, the demonstrative, that we often leave out of account the souls that have made us, the influences that have charmed away the devil. We like something stupendous; we love to have twentieth century funds, and oh into what sweltering excitement we work ourselves when we hear that other people have contributed them. It is so un-Jesus like, such a horrible affront on Calvary and its Cross, all this romance. If people would give a stated sum out of each year's income, say one tenth, every year would produce five times more than any twentieth century fund ever produced. But who will do that? It is commonplace. There is the answer, Do it systematically, unfailingly, on the first day of the week, and we should have revenue enough for all purposes. But we do not like these inner and spiritual modes of working. No!—a dinner — champagne — loud cheers — another thousand! O Thou sweet Jesus, no wonder Thou dost turn away Thy marred face and seek the wilderness.

But you do not know really how to reckon your income? You reckon it for the queen, why not for the King? But we like that which is romantic, obvious, dazzling, prodigious. And so, following out the same line of thought, we write long books about what we call great men and their great doings. And all this is right; we wait for the books, we are thankful for them, because they may be instrumental in our higher education, and they may bring to us inspiration, impulse, encouragement, stimulus, just what we need in many a laggard mood. But there are lives that have no biography, though they may be amongst the most fruitful of lives. I think Mrs. Gladstone's life was one of these—full of kindness, sunshine, sympathy, gentleness. I have seen her close at hand, and have been affected and stimulated by her sweet and most motherly presence. I dare only speak as an onlooker, but what little onlooking I have been able to do has been to my own heart most elevating and sanctifying. Such a woman sweetened the atmosphere, her very presence drove away unholiness and every suggestion of it, and created a disinfecting light as well as a luminous glory. What it must be to be in one's eighty-ninth year as she was, and to look back so far and to be unable to find out any one mischief, injury, or infelicitous mark! this must be a triumph of the sweet grace of Jesus Christ; the whole life-line a line of light. I saw her when she went into the Abbey on the occasion of Mr. Gladstone's never-to-be-forgotten interment. She walked as if she were keeping an appointment, went with some spring and energy and expectancy, as one who had said in her heart, I must not be late, I must not keep him waiting. I saw her when she returned, and she was alone—a bride without a bridegroom, a widow old as her age, and yet a gleaming, beauteous light flooding the whole countenance. On Tuesday next she will be taken back, and the wedding will be completed. What we want to feel more and more is how much we are indebted to people who have no outstanding and demonstrative fame, but the greater renown of making other lives rich and happy, and turning the whole house and home into a picture of sunshine. We may all excel in some degree along this line; we can all make somebody else happy; some

in this way, some in that way, but we can all live, the very smallest and humblest of us, so as to be one day missed. We may by the grace of God and the charity of our renewed lives so live as to leave a great vacancy in at least one or two hearts. That is fame, and all other fame is a bubble and a vanishing smoke.

"We all do fade." Yet we do not believe it. We see how another man is failing, fading, ageing, and we remark to one another when the man is not there, I saw a great difference in him, he was much older looking than when I saw him last; I saw that the experience through which he had been passing had wasted him a good deal. And do you know, observing and talkative critic, that the same thing was observed in your own case by another person? We all do fade, we all age. I thought I saw in his attitude and motion a stoop like the stoop of fatigue. Did you? That is the very thing he thought he saw in you who think yourself so young and lithe and alert; I heard a man say about you the other day that he was under the impression that you had aged a good deal. "We all"—it is the common fate, it is the common destiny.

What wonderful reading there is in the Bible about this departure of men! Some of the Old Testament words make me at once sad and glad; notably this—a text I can never pass over without a tear—"Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation." Poor scribe! he began well, he pointed out that one man had died—"And Joseph died"—he had time to write that line, he thought he was the biographer of the world. Yet presently he says, "and all his brethren." Why not name them one by one? O, they die so fast I have no time to give the details, the names, and therefore I group them together and say, "all his brethren." What more? "And all that generation." He who began to individualise, who began so to say in his biographical capacity with the simple unit of individualism, is obliged, so quickly does death follow his writing, to shut up his sentence with "and all that generation." The unit changes; we speak of a dying individual, then of families, then

of generations. The invisible cruel archer shoots so fast that a generation is gone before the names of the brethren can be recorded. Nor dare I pass this text without meditating upon it with tearfulness, for after all he was a great man, a prince and a great man, a king and a great man; and this is the record, "So Saul died, and his three sons, and all his house died together" (1 Chron. x. 6). Why not read it again? It is such a pregnant record. How hurried must the historian have been, how assured that if he did not make haste there would be a thousand more men carried past him dead. "So Saul died, and his three sons, and all his house died together." Where is king Saul? Gone; his three sons? Gone. Any remnant of his house? Gone. You know how a shadow goes; shadows leave no imprints.

These may be commonplaces, but they are the commonplaces we need to remember. Do not debase the divine poetry of providence into commonplace by saying that you knew all that very well,—talking to me as if I did not know all that before. Sir, you never knew it; a man talking so can know nothing; he is a fool in the sanctuary, and the altar shudders when he nears it. All that generation of workers. They were a fine strong old tribe; I knew some of them well, they were stalwarts, they were genuine men; they lived for the church, they delighted in the courts of the Lord, and they never said they were done. "All that generation." They were severe; oftentimes we passed them as a set of austere old gentlemen; but they made England. All that generation of givers. They were noble souls; they said everything they had belonged to Jesus Christ. We have reversed their way of looking at things; I am not sure that their way was not the right way. They said, All this gold is Christ's; I suppose we must live whilst we live now—how little of this can we take for living purposes? They took as little as possible, and invested all the other in the bank of God. When I came to London, Samuel Morley, one of the true children of God, said to me, "Call upon me for anything you want in beginning this great work of yours in London." All that generation of workers, givers, and types of men—great trustees and stewards

of the divine will. Some of their sons survive and wear the paternal mantle with great grace and dignity, but many of them do not, and many men who have been made by the old process have abandoned it for the new trick. I will not speak of them ; hounds that ought not to have a name! All that generation—the old-fashioned, the well-tried, the well-instructed and deeply experienced souls. They were not so very glaring and attractive, but they made England. Yet these men have successors, and some of their successors are quite equal to any of the predecessors ; the work has been varied, not ended ; it is the same work conducted under different conditions. Yet though there be differences of administration there should be one spirit, and that spirit a spirit of consecration and love, simplicity, devotion, obedience to the spiritual, the unseen, and the eternal. I delight to think that though many have faded away like the leaf, there are to-day as good men, as good workers, as good givers, as good types and examples as ever lived since the days of Bethlehem. Yet it does us good to visit the old places, the old graves, and to take up the old books. I have books that I look at sometimes, curiously bound books, sort of binding in sheepskin ; curious old type—my father's edition of Boston's Fourfold State. Who dare be found reading that book to-day? Yet it is fat with the fatness of Christ ; it was written by a man whose heart was in the heart of Christ ; you will have some difficulty in finding an edition of it ; it is not the kind of book that is sold in tens of thousands, but if a dozen men in this congregation or any other congregation should read it, study it, and inwardly digest it, they would make their influence felt as spiritual powers, they would be as living rocks and as throbbing, glowing pillars in the house of my God.

"We all do fade as a leaf." So I must make the best of my dwindling opportunities, and this should be the lesson to the youngest leaf amongst us. Even now in this mid-June what do you find? All the laburnums nearly or many of them on the ground, all that golden water ; the flower of the laburnum tree has dripped, dripped, dripped, and the golden water, as the German calls it, is lying very largely on the ground.

Dear, sweet yellow flower, the canary of flowers and trees, thou hadst but a short day, but now that I crush thy yellow beauty under foot I will say to myself, "We all do fade as a leaf"; and thus in thy dying, thou laburnum, shalt teach me lessons about the measurement of time and the duration of life and the duty of making the best of present opportunities. We could all make somebody happy whilst we live; not always by leaving money, but by giving pleasure, giving sympathy, by showing that we are not indifferent to the distresses and the necessities of other people. Believe me, there is no virtue in social indifference: as who should say, Make the best of it for yourselves. Grander man is he who says to the virtuously poor, I cannot help you much, but I will help you all I can. You do not know how long you will have the opportunity of helping. Once I knew a man whom I thought quite equal to king Saul; and his grandchildren have come to beg at my door; this morning I have a letter respecting one of his grandchildren who would like to be housed in some refuge for indigent gentlewomen. The wolves of sons which that man had tore the flesh off his bones, wrecked his house, and others have to suffer for their cruel villany. We know not what shall be on the earth. Do good to seven, and withhold not a portion from eight; for thou knowest not what shall be. Showers soon swell into deluges, and winds rise into storms; that which but an hour since was blue as the bluest of morning azure may in a few hours more be dark with storm and big with tempest. Do not let us mourn the past, but ennoble the present, and by ennobling the present prepare for the fruition and harvest delight of the future.

We have all done wrong. We all do fade as a leaf, and we all do sin as the prodigal son. If I have been hard with any man — I thank God I cannot remember an instance of hardness, and I say this to His glory and not to my own praise—but if I have been hard with any man it was a pity, a sad and terrible pity, a great solemn degradation of manhood. If I have been hard with any human creature when I could have been gentle, then I have dishonoured the Lord, I have misinterpreted the Gospel, and I am a

base man worthy of the pit. You never had such an opportunity in your life for showing the divine Christ as when another man said to you, I did you wrong—will you pardon me? That was your chance; then you might have been a great man. It was not a time for snarling and reproaching and wakening up sharp memories, it was a time for tears and sobbing and heartbreak and outgoing of the soul to the man who asked to be pitied and pardoned.

"We all do fade," and our time fades, our years crumble away, and the man is now digging the grave I shall lie in next week. This is the view of life to take, so as to make the best of the golden but passing moments. And if we live in the right way and fade according to the gentle laws of nature, what is it but to fade into immortality—to languish into life?

ORDER OF SERVICE AT THE CITY TEMPLE ON SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 17TH, 1900.

Voluntary ... ... "Andante" ... ... *Mendelssohn.*

Anthem 14 ... ... "As the hart panteth" ... ... *Mason.*

The Lord's Prayer.—*Field.*

Hymn 51 ... "Praise to the Holiest in the height."

1st Lesson. Zech. vii. 8-13.

Chant 127 ... ... Isaiah xii. ... ... *Elvey.*

2nd Lesson. Acts vii. 54-58.

Anthem ... ... "The Lord hath chosen Zion" ... *J. F. Bridge.*

The Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.—Psalm cxxxii. 13, 14, 16.

Solo: Miss STANLEY LUCAS.

Prayer.

Hymn 42 (*omit ver.* 4): "My God, I thank Thee."

Sermon.

Offertory and Duet:

"Children, pray" ... ... (*God Thou art Great*) *Spohr.*

Hymn 241 (*1st Tune*): "The Lord is rich and merciful."

Benediction and Threefold Amen.—*Gounod.*

Voluntary ... ... "Postlude" ... ... *Ouseley.*

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou dost lash us with the thong of questioning. Thou dost pour out Thine inquiries upon us like a torrent, and we have no breath to reply; Thou dost speak about strange times and far away spaces, and behold, when Thou dost lay the lash upon us we gather together as it were at the heel of God. Yet how boastful we are, how full of pride, how utterly fuming, and how we bow down to the spirit of vanity. Teach us that if any man think that he knoweth anything he knoweth nothing as it ought to be known; he that is least in Thy sight is also greatest. Teach us to hold our tongues; oh that we could behave ourselves in Thy presence and not return Thy questionings in our own vain form. If Thou wilt give us grace to say, "I was dumb because Thou didst it," Thou wilt work a miracle in us by the power of the Holy Ghost. We cannot tell what Thou doest; who can follow all Thy way? who can keep pace with the lightning flash that goeth from one point to another in a moment? Teach us our littleness, and in our littleness may we find our greatness: blessed are the meek, for they shall be great inheritors, and all things they can bear and carry well will come to them and ask for acceptance. We thank Thee that Thou hast made us inquirers; now do Thou make us inquirers that are reverent and humble and meek-minded, for Thou dost temple with those who are of a broken heart, and into the contrite spirit Thou dost come with the quietness of light. The Lord help us through this wondrous, weary, painful, glorious life; teach us that our days are but as a handbreadth, and may we work well within the limited space. We look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Lord, increase our faith, and thereby increase our best knowledge; enable us to see more and more into the mystery and meaning of the Cross. At the Cross we stand; we cannot explain it, we receive it, and we would work and suffer in the spirit of it. Amen.

LXXXIX.

HUMBLING QUESTIONS.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, JUNE 21ST, 1900.

"*Art thou the first man that was born?*"—JOB xv. 7.

WHAT cutting and snubbing questions there are in the Bible! What a thong it is; how we are lashed like hounds! It will be profitable from time to time to study some of the humbling questions of the Bible. In fact, are there any other questions than those that are humbling in the whole compass of revelation? How can this Book hope to make itself popular? It is flattery that gathers popularity, at least for a time; how can this man Christ Jesus ever expect to make Himself popular when He says His badge is the Cross, the daily Cross; the Cross not of dramatic conception and speculation, but of real blood-suffering? This is not a Man to make Himself popular. He cuts down to the root of things; we heard indeed early concerning Him that the axe was laid to the root of the tree. Everybody about Him seems to ask the same question, having drunk of His Spirit and caught the holy contagion of His moral fury. "O generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell?" This was not popular preaching, and the church ought not to be a popular resort. Let those go to bands and parades and demonstrations and fools' merriments who want to be popular, but keep far away from Him whose every question is a thong.

"Art thou the first man that was born?" Eliphaz plays questioner to Job; he pelts him well. "Wast thou made before the hills? Hast thou heard the

secret of God? What knowest thou, that we know not? what understandest thou, which is not in us? With us are both the grayheaded and very aged men, much elder than thy father. Is there any secret thing with thee?" And thus he mocks him. Job might have borne all this interrogatory chastening and whipping, this question-scourging, this new and biting discipline, if it had been confined to Eliphaz the Temanite; but later on another questioner comes to him, and beats him and lashes him without sparing, and pours upon him torrents of contempt. So that Job's few days undergo such a shrinkage that he feels as if he had never been born. "Art thou the first man that was born?" Art thou Adam that we have read about? Hast thou lived all the centuries, and gathered all their wisdom? Speak up! Yet it does us good to have these humbling questions put to us now and then, whilst we are dressing and whilst the man-servant is there, and the maid-servant, and all the jewel box is being opened, and all wild preparation is being made for outshining the stars of night. It does us good now and then for an imp or some demonlike thing to be squatting near our ear and saying, Who art thou at the best? and canst thou see to-morrow? Knowest thou that thou shalt come home to-night filled with envy and jealousy and maddened because of disappointment? And thy days, how many? art thou as old as England? England was once a swamp. Boast not of thy ancestry, for thou hadst none but a handful of mud; have no pride in these poor jewels, for they may all be stolen to-night. Thieves are members of a learned profession. What hast thou at the best that thou hast not received? Oh, why not kiss the hand of the Giver and know that in the sight of God the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is of great price? Why not now begin to learn the higher, deeper, broader wisdom?

We may have humbling enough if we would but attend to the case. It is when we put our fingers in our ears and draw down our eyelids and think that all is going well that we enjoy a moment's game, speculation, and a species of criminal luxury. If we would see in every bad man our brother, in every Cain a man that wants to murder us and a Cain that is in

very deed in ourselves, were he but awakened, we should have reason enough to walk softly all the days of our lives. And what are we at the best? The worm has already whetted the appetite that is to be sated on our proud flesh. It were well for men now and then to think, consider out things together, and make arithmetical calculations as well as spiritual outlooks, forecasts, and holy speculations.

When the poet accompanies himself upon a harp, he had to buy the very harp that he makes eloquent. The man that made the harp probably never played; he made harps for other people. You would say the man who can make a harp must be a harper. As well say that the carpenter who made the ship is a navigator. It is very wonderful all this intertwisting and intertwining of men and men, trades and occupations and professions and gifts; it is a wondrous thing this social unit. We are very great in the individual unit; there we feel quite certain and quite strong and quite impious. The individual unit, the one-coated man standing before his own looking-glass, what is he? Why, in a spider's first string that he throws out to start his web from there are sixty strands. We are made for one another; one man is completed by another man. No one should despise any one; there should be a sense of commonwealth and unity, and thus we should get from the unit of isolation the unit of society. No man thinking that he was the only man or even the first man that ever was born, but every man looking out for some other man, and being quite sure that he is there; though he be hidden for a moment he is there, and there for a purpose. What knowledge have we? Only what we have been told. We who despise authority live upon it. That is very like us. It is a marvellous thing that we gather ourselves together in great numbers in order to demonstrate against authority, and every man amongst us is living on the authority of another man. Do not tell him that, because it would spoil his demonstration, and he likes to throw his hat high in the air, and despise authority. The multiplication table is authoritative. Somehow or other it has come amongst us to be regarded as final; pity indeed it is that the first man that ever was born

does not rise up and make a multiplication table of his own and insist upon everybody adopting it. But we despise authority, we hate that word; it touches our blood as the spur touches the blood of a high-bred animal; we cannot stand it, and yet we must submit to it and live under it, and we cannot cast it off without casting ourselves off at the same time. Have we any original knowledge? Who taught us the rules by which we regulate our speech? Did we invent them? No. Is it not open to every man to invent his own syntax? Yes, and it is open to every other man to laugh at him for doing it. There are very few things open to us except genuine humility and true, exact self-esteem in the sight of God, and a holiness that looks well, but oh so grey when foiled with the infinite whiteness of the ineffable purity of God.

"Art thou the first man that was born?" There must have been a first man. He might possibly have had some measure of independence from a merely superficial view of himself, but he had no real independence, he was part of the next man that was coming, and thus we belong to posterity as well as ancestry, and we hand on the life which we have often stained and spoiled. If I am not the first man that was born, if I am not the only man, then it follows that I must consult some other man. That is an extraordinary process. It is a process that goes on in every city and in every family all the time. The doctor sends for the doctor. One would think he might by this time have been too wise to do that, but he falls into the general superstition at least and sends for the doctor, and dies *secundum artem* and has a doctor's certificate that he died properly. I must consult some other man. Do I not know law enough to guide my own affairs? Possibly, and possibly not. You must consult some other man on certain things, even if after prolonged and wise consultation you adopt a policy gathered from the total council. We belong to one another. Your friend knows better than you do how certain cases stand, because you may be part and parcel of the cases, and he stands aside or at a proper distance giving them the right proportion, perspective, and colour, and

he, being a wise man, can tell you what to do, and you in your turn may be able to render the same service to him. We belong to one another. There is but one Man—multifold, but one. Thus self-conceit is smitten on the cheekbone; thus the back of pride is lashed with the thong of a true retribution and resentment; and thus and thus variously we are taught that no one man is all men, but that all men are one Man, and that there was but one fount of blood out of which all veins were filled, and there is but one fount of blood which can cleanse the putrid sinfulness and crime into which we have drawn and plunged ourselves by some act of awful, stupendous suicide.

Thus God makes one man debtor to another, and so creates mutual interests. When you "take a man in," using a commercial phrase, you do not enrich yourself. That is curious, but it is true. You enrich yourself apparently or for the moment, you increase your possessions for the moment at least; but you do not really enrich yourself, your soul, and there is no abiding, no durableness, in the stuff that you get with a thief's hand. Honesty is rich, economy is wealth; he who has few wants has many riches. We are, however, debtors to one another in a deeper and broader sense. The apostle said, "I am a debtor both to the Jews and the Gentiles,"—I am a debtor to everybody. Why so, Paul, and how? tell me. Inasmuch as I have the Gospel and they have not yet received the Gospel, I am a debtor to every man who does not know the secret of the divine love, and I must away and tell him what I know and thus discharge the debt. If you know anything really wise and good that some other man does not know, and the knowing of which would enrich and dignify him, you are a debtor to that man; not a debtor in the financial or book-keeping sense, but a debtor in the higher spiritual sense, that you know a secret or mystery the knowledge of which and the appropriation of which is eternal life. You are not to hold it as a secret, you are to dispense it as a blessing. Herein is the glory of the Gospel, it belongs to every man;—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," as if you were paying the creature

a debt, and tell him that you are doing so. You are a trustee, a steward; you are in more than a fiduciary position, you hold the Gospel for the saving of the world. Go, tell it! Stop the winds till you fill them with this music, then let them go and carry it over all the wildernesses. How strange is man, how utterly peculiar! He thinks that he has some things of his own right, whereas he has nothing. May not a man do what he likes with his own? Certainly, but first find it. The moment that you have found anything that is your own, do what you like with it. What I hold in my hand is surely my own? No, your hand is not your own. What hast thou that thou hast not received? Trace things back, and you will be surprised to find—I am sorry to disappoint you, unless I can turn the disappointment into a blessing—you will certainly find that you are not the first man that was born. You talk as if you were. Yes, that is another thing altogether. You seem to receive your guests as if you were receiving so much disagreeable mud; but art thou the first man that was born? How we are thus cut up, snubbed, humiliated! Is there a sight more humbling in the world than to see a man take on the airs of a peacock? Why, his very tail is not his own. We are born into furnished houses, yet we have the notion somehow or other that we furnish our own houses. We do not, in any true, deep sense of the term. We were born into libraries. Disraeli said that he was born in a library. That was literally true, but he was also born into a library. We are all inheritors, though we have paid probably in many cases no succession duties and no death dues. Milton was born before us, and Shakespeare, and the great poets, dreamers, writers, prophets; and we are born into these inheritances, and somehow think that we created them. We created nothing. Wise men who know much by calculation say that if you were three miles from your house and had to make an adequate road such as you find in civilised cities before you could get home, you would be seventy years in getting there. You do not believe it? I thought not, because I can see by your face that you do not believe anything. But wise men who make calculations and tabulate experiences and precedents made that statement, and thereby show us how much we are

indebted to the men who came before us and made the road. It is enough for us to find fault with it.

We are debtors, therefore, let me repeat again and again, to one another, because the first man belongs to the second man, and the second man to the first man, and when a third man comes they will be divided and sub-divided, and when the three-hundredth man comes we shall begin to shape our relations and define our responsibilities, and make that marvellous star called Society, that no telescope can see thoroughly into and which no calculation can estimate at its full and enduring value. You sing? Yes, I sing a little. You make your own songs? No. Is it possible that when people get together in church they are not singing their own hymns? Not only possible, but it is a serious fact that all our hymns were written for us and we had but to learn them. Then we are not the first men that were born? No. And what is our relation to the first man? Debtors. And the coming men? Debtors. And we ourselves, what are we, pray say in plain, simple, motherlike English? Debtors. Then we belong to one another? That is philosophically and literally true; and what one man has another man may not have, and what one man has not another man may be able to supply. We are members one of another, like the jointed body. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

Applying this line of thought to the highest spiritual things, let us remember that we did not invent the Gospel. This is no modern thought; this is no yesterday's ware turned out of some oven in the manufacturing districts. This is older than man. The Cross is older than Adam; the Cross is just as old as the love of God. When you have fixed the date of the birth of the love of God you have fixed the date of the meaning of the Cross. Yet if we come into historical times, say into Mosaic years, we shall find the Cross in the Book of Genesis, we shall find the Cross in the Book of Revelation. Jesus Christ is the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. Our temptation is to amend the Gospel, to add something to it or take something from it, or set our own finger-mark upon its beauty. If we could but deliver

the Gospel instead of attempting to invent it, we might do some good. "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received." That was the apostolic declaration, and if we would be in the apostolic succession we must do exactly what the apostle Paul himself did: he "received" the Gospel and "delivered" it. That is all we have to do; or if we make any contribution to it, which we cannot make to its substance, but to its illustration, it must be the contribution of our own personal experience in agonising prayer, in self-crucifixion, and in the dwelling with God in secret places where the fountains throw up their healing waters for our refreshment and our renewal. The Gospel is in every bush of the summer, in every bird of the air, in every act of suffering, in the vicarious mother and the vicarious father: these are parables given to us to help us understand the central Gospel, which is that Jesus Christ tasted death for every man.

Then as we are indebted to the past we should make the future indebted to us. There was an old maxim in the older political economy which is not at all to be despised—that we ought to endeavour to make two blades of grass grow where one blade of grass grew before. The earth has brought forth no grass yet; all those green meadows we see are nothing but parabolic signs of the grass that is in the earth. Why, it is all grass, all nutrition, nutriment, food, sustenance: and when the people praise the Lord in a worthy song, adequate in compass, in tone, in meaning, the old earth will give us thirty harvests in one. We may live so as to be missed; we may offer a suggestion that will help the solution of the deepest problems; we can breathe a healthy breath, and a healthy breath is peace. Let us limit our mischievousness, let us do nothing to make men angry or to hurt poor human hearts, but let us so live that the house will feel very empty after we have gone. It will be an excellent discipline, a real good soul-schooling, if we can enter into this great scheme of questioning which is revealed in the Bible. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or

who laid the corner stone thereof; when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" Where wast thou? O thou poor braggart, thou art of yesterday and thou knowest nothing. Canst thou see through one sheet of paper and tell me what is on the other side of it? No. Canst thou see through the film of the night and behold the morning before it hath risen upon the eastern hills? No. It behoveth thee, therefore, to be quiet and calm and to go to God with thy questions, and to hide thyself in the love and mystery of the Cross.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, teach us, we humbly pray Thee, that we are but men. Our lives are as a vapour that passeth away; we are here for a little time. May we remember that the secret things belong unto the Lord, and that the things that are revealed belong unto us and our children to do all the words that are written in Thy law. Rebuke our pride, bring our vanity into humiliation; may we always be silent before God, and reverently wait upon Him that we may know, through Jesus Christ the Lord, what He would have us do.

May grace, mercy, and peace, the jewels of God, make our hearts rich for ever. Amen.

PRAYER.

WE bless Thee, Thou Living One, that the songs of the Church are also our song. We sing of Thy mercy, and we say that it endureth for ever. In the old, old time men sang of Thy mercy, and said, It endureth for ever; in the ages that have yet to come men and women will sing of Thy mercy, and say, It endureth for ever. We live in Thy mercy, we are the children of Thy compassion; because Thy tears fail not therefore are we spared. We do not keep ourselves; in ourselves we have no strength, and we have no resources; our sufficiency is of God, He giveth us all things richly to enjoy; we have nothing that we have not received. So we will say again and again with every sunrise and every sunset, His mercy endureth for ever. Thou hast turned our very life into a song, Thou hast made midnight bright as noonday when we remember that Thy mercy endureth for ever. We have sinned against God with a high hand, with an outstretched arm, with great rebelliousness; but Thy mercy endureth for ever. Hear, we humbly pray Thee at the Cross, the sighing of each penitent heart which says in brokenness and self-helplessness, God be merciful unto me a sinner! Let there be a great sense of forgiveness amongst us; may we feel as if heaven had been opened from within, and that a great voice had said, Her iniquity is pardoned and her trespass is forgotten. If we could hear some such voice in our innermost consciousness we would sing a great anthem before Thee, loud and sweet and far-sounding, and the burden of it should be, His mercy endureth for ever. We all need mercy; like sheep we have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way. But is there not One that taketh away the sin of the world? is His name not Jesus? signifying that He shall save the people from their sins; is He not figured to us as a Lamb set apart as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world? There is none righteous, no, not one; may not one man therefore seek to crush his brother offender; we are all in the same condemnation, now here, now there, now in this way, now in some other way, but there is none righteous, no, not one; priest and people are all cast down into the same condemnation; there is none righteous; the man who prays is the man who sins,—may it be that the man who sins become also the man who prays. Thus in this wondrous manifold life, now praying, now sinning, now hoping, and now black with unutterable fear, yet all the while the great process is going on, which means purity, morning, liberty, joy, and final heaven. Have mercy upon those who need it most, if any need it more than others. Thou lookest upon broken-heartedness and con-

trition : may we pay our vows unto Thee that we vow in the house of distress and in the chamber of desolation and darkness They were great cries we uttered then, and now that we are freed again for a little time and are permitted to go out into Thine open air and bright sunshine, may we remember the vows of the darkened room. Pity us, for we are so soon cast aside as it were by our own hands, and we are swift to forget the very prayers that made us men. It is a sad world, a hard and costly school, and the Master's rod cuts to the bone. Oh ! that we might remember something, that we may not forget everything, but bring out of the great brawl and strife some holy part and redeem it by daily sweet behaviour. Look upon the old and the young and the little child we have left at home to sleep its religion whilst we come to utter ours. Be with our sick ones ; Thou only canst heal ; men can trifle with disease, but Thou canst heal it. And be with any who are in peril on the sea or who are in the far-away wilderness ; let Thy love search them out, and not Thine anger, and may they also join the high chorus of the infinite hymn, saying, His mercy endureth for ever. Amen.

XC.

A PASTORAL RETROSPECT.

Preached on Sunday Morning, June 24th, 1900.

I MUST put away the sermon I had prepared for this morning, and take it out of its resting-place some other time ; for something says to me, It is not the right subject, and you can to-day make nothing of it. I am always thus led by the Spirit. I know that what I had prepared would be out of season, out of tune, out of the whole environment of this occasion, which neither you nor I make, but which was made by due fluxion and process of time, and I am full of the suggestion which the occasion brings with it. It is almost to a day thirty-one years since you and I were pastorally wedded at the altar. It was June and about this part of June, and certainly this is the Sunday in June, and the whole thing comes back upon me with such vividness and tenderness that I must get rid of it before I can go on with the

usual plough, continuing the furrow we have been at these thirty-one years—a long furrow and deep and plenty of seed in it, not of our sowing, but of God's.

May I begin by asking you to cut off thirty-one years from your life? Where were you and what were you thirty-one years ago? They say that men who have sons and daughters growing up around them are more sensible of the flight of time than men who have no such living standards by which to measure and estimate themselves. I cannot speak for such men, for I have a great host of sons and daughters growing up around me in this house; and when I look at those who came to my ministry with their little hymn-books and standing on the forms or seats and lustily singing something or other with the hymn-book upside down, it seems to me that I must have been too long in the world; for now they are fathers, mothers, people in office, in the City, in the suburbs, people of high responsibility, some of them of great character, others of overflowing usefulness in the Church; and here am I almost seeking an apology for being amongst living men. You must judge all things in their relation. Thirty-one years, and talking on the same subject all the time! We have never changed the theme; we have never changed the text. All the texts are one text; they all run back into the Cross, the sacrifice, the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, the marvellous and tender providence of God, counting the hairs of our head, numbering our steps, sending the sun blazing every morning upon our windows great and small. Thirty-one years of the Bible! No other book could be used in the same way and with the same high energy, taking the Church as a whole, but the Bible. It is in this way that the Bible proves its inspiration. We take out of it, and leave it as full as we found it. It is like the sun,—always giving itself away, and to-day as bright as when it shone on Eden. This is the test of the book. Do not let us go to false and inadequate standards and ask little questions about great subjects. The Bible in its sufficiency, in its complete covering and encompassing of all human experience, is a book which needs no help whatever in the way of apology and vital sustenance from any man's

ingenuity, erudition, or critical faculty. Let the Bible alone, let it do its own work in the training of families, in the direction of business, in the inspiration of life, and at the long end, in the sum-total we shall say, It was the Word of the Lord. It has proved itself to be such by its depth, its tenderness, its simplicity, and its ability to meet us in all the need and sorrow and pain and helplessness of this tragic life.

By the mercy of God, therefore, we have been able to keep to our one book and our one subject and steadily to work towards our one high purpose. What is that? The saving of men. There is no other object worth pursuing but to save a soul from death. Why, that is enough to challenge the highest powers of energy and the most blinding glory of wisdom. To have the satisfaction created in us and provided for us by the blessed Spirit of God that we have been enabled to help some poor soul—that is the golden and more than golden reward. Every faithful servant of Christ, be he ever so small and weak, may appropriate and enjoy this great reward which in itself is the beginning and assurance of a final coronation.

Where were you thirty-one years ago? Some of you were just beginning business, and you did not know whether it would fail or whether it would succeed, and you had to count every penny. That was not a bad time in life for you; it was a school-time, it was a period of discipline. Everything under God's blessing depended upon your action just then. If you had been spendthrifts, if you had been self-indulgent, if you had cared nothing for either pence or pounds, you would not have been here to-day. I am speaking, of course, to a certain section of the audience. You have laboured faithfully and well, and you have shown great commercial sagacity, and above all great commercial integrity, and if you have thousands a year, I wish you had ten times as many thousands, because you deserve it all, and you would spend it all right well, and everybody about you would feel that your accounts and transactions were about where they ought to be, and there is a feeling of sunshine in the social air because you have been making so many people just as happy as you could possibly make

them. That is the kind of prosperity that I pray for, that it may be doubled and multiplied by high figures, because everybody will directly or indirectly be the better for your prosperity. It may have gone otherwise with some people. They may have squandered the little they began with; it was only a hundred pounds or two hundred pounds, and you may somehow have got through the little sum, and yet nobody could directly fasten upon you a reproach that could be justified. You have been sweet-tempered, really amiable, of fine creamy disposition; I am not here to reproach any poor soul. But the fact is, you did not get up soon enough in the morning. Do not take it as a reproach or an impeachment, because the gift of sleep has been given to some heads in undue measure. You cannot call it a high crime and misdemeanour; yet there it is. The other man was up before you, and that is the reason why you did not succeed as you would like to have done. Yet not a single man in society can point a finger of shame at you. There are many ways of not doing a thing: the positive hostile way which says in effect, I will not do it, and the indolent, indifferent, sleepy-headed way that says, Well, I fully intend to do it, and I think probably I shall do it to-morrow, and if I do not do it to-morrow I shall do it very soon. Ah! that is one of the little foxes that spoil the grapes. Still you are here, and still the lamp of hope is not altogether quenched; friends have been raised up for you in one way and another, and you are here to join the hymn of one-and-thirty years' co-labour, and to say in loud, resounding tones, His mercy endureth for ever.

How many have we dropped by the wayside? I have a melancholy way of numbering the lost and the left. Some we left behind because we really could not assist them, and many we laid in the grave and flung a flower in the empty place. We wanted them to go with us all the miles, and we wanted to lie down with them that at one and the same moment we might enter into the vision of light and into the ecstasy of the heavenly song. What I have seen in those broad pews! I have a list of those whose faces once shone upon me as I

gazed from this pulpit. Some were old, and their going was not dying. We do not say that the sun dies; he sets, he passes beyond the one wave that he may rise in silvery brightness on another wave, which he will do in due time. We thank God for the aged who have died. They were each like a shock of corn fully ripe, and they left their labours and their hallowed memories behind them, and they will be inspirations and solaces to us right through the late afternoon and far away into the darkening night. They were your fathers. I remember your father sitting there, and I remember your sweet mother looking at you whilst the service was proceeding as if by a gentle look she could bind you to the altar, and encourage you to take up some deep vow and make it the keyword and the light of your life. We have not lost them. We do not lose whom we remember; they abide with us, and they do much for us that we cannot follow in letters and set forth in visible figures. Blessed are they who live lives of holy sweetness and beneficence! I mean the folks that were not great folks, great energetic factors in social life, but who lived sweetly, helpfully, forgivingly; those who kept the door ajar for us when we were too late out at night, and who watched as if they had not been watching and took us in as if we had never been out. Oh the sweetness, the tenderness! I remember some instances perfectly, and they help a man to pray and to preach and to hope. My notion at the first was to dedicate or consecrate all the windows in this church that were of a memorial nature to the honour of decent, quiet, home-loving persons, whose fame was in the house, who made the house, and when they went the house went and the sunshine perished as before a great fear. That was my notion of the windows, to perpetuate the memory of home ones—my father, my mother, my brethren. I heard my various people say, I will put in a memorial window to that dear old mother soul. She could not believe that anybody ever put in a window for her, but I will, said the young mercantile man who was doing well in the market-place. Her name was never in the newspaper until she died, but she shall be had, so far as I can secure the end, in everlasting remembrance; so that

when people ask about her they will discover, perhaps to their happy surprise, that this was put in to the memory of one who made home happy and who made her husband rich without adding a penny to his store.

I have been confirmed in what has always been an impression and what has sometimes deepened into a conviction—I have been confirmed in my view that where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached with the energy of experience and the tenderness of sympathy and a right apprehension of the battle and misery of human life, there will always be a congregation to listen. When we came to this City it was through an array of evil prophecies. There was practically nobody in the City; the few people that were in the City were so tired of it that they travelled by train and omnibus and tramway to the outlying green fields. It was impossible to get an audience in the City; on the Sunday the City was doomed to desolation and silence and utter forsakenness in every aspect and meaning of that term. Yet we must come. Why? We could not tell; we had no list of reasons. We had no reason to leave another place where we were revelling in social fatness and prosperity. But there is a spirit in man; that spirit communicates with the Spirit of God and with all the gloom yet glory of destiny. We felt ourselves obliged to come. And we are ready to testify that it has only been the Gospel, nothing but the Gospel, simple, pure, practical, sympathetic, redeeming, that has accounted for these thirty-one years of really delightful experiences in the helping of our fellow-men. I do not know that preachers ever hear much about their great discourses that are full of hard words and deep sayings, and are greater mysteries to the preacher than they can possibly be to the hearer; I do not know that preachers ever had any very great encouragement in the direction of making the Gospel difficult by turning it into a kind of paltry science and inflated idea of social reform and respectability. What we have heard has been that the prayer helped me in a difficulty, that the prayer lifted me out of the valley, that the reading of the Scripture was like the sudden illumination of an unexpected light flaring, flaming from the heavens and shining into all the nooks and

corners of misery and despair. What we have heard is this, that some little sentence, some comforting word, has gone right into the heart, and by the power of God has created a new manhood and called forth latent energies, so latent as to have been unsuspected. This is God's way. He blesses simple things; He makes sacramental supper just out of bread men are eating at the time, and turns the sour supper wine into symbolic blood. We should be nearer God if we wished to be so. He is on the highway, He is in the market-place, He is in every blade of grass, and when a bird sings in the high tree, so sings as to attract the attention of the heart and to make Misery dry away her hot tear, God is not far off.

We have nothing to do with the future, nothing to do even with to-morrow. We gave some eight-and-twenty thousand pounds directly and indirectly for the land on which this house stands. The City of London is a great and generous City, but it does not give its land away for nothing; even the City must draw a line somewhere. And within a fortnight we were offered forty thousand pounds for the plot of ground; but we were not land speculators; we wanted a sanctuary, we were in quest of a home for the church, and therefore we did not take the forty thousand pounds and go into the suburbs to preach and sing among green hedges and rival songsters in the woods and forests. We settled down in the City proper, we are in the City proper now. Though some wise man addresses a letter to me this very morning in which we are described as being in the West Centre. We have not the honour of that W. Many men would give a great deal to be able to put the letter W anywhere on their letters. I sign N.W., but there is so much N in it that sometimes the W looks so small. But we are in the Eastern Centre, we are in the City; and there is no place like it, and if I had to build in London I would build in the City of London; if I had to rebuild this place and had all London at my disposal I would put the same building up on the same lines of land. It was God, through Mr. Deputy Fry, then a high name in the City, who fixed this place for us, and He will fix all the places we want if we will let Him. But we must fuss and

arrange and invent and plan and replan and plague our little brains with our own managements: whereas God says as it were within an inch of those same heads, If you would obey I would build, I would fix the bounds of your habitation, I would take care of things for you. But we won't let Him; and that is the worst species of atheism,—to confess God, and take no heed of Him; to acknowledge on paper that there is a God, and never to attend to His statutes and commandments; to say in pompous form, "I believe in God Almighty," in the sense that I will never call Him into my counsels or attempt to invite His interposition in the providence of my daily life.

So far, I am here to say, He hath done all things well. We would like a word about the future, all of us, but we cannot have it. The future will, I am afraid, ruin some of us, because we want to pry into it, and it is enwrapped in so many folds that it does not lie within the deftness and skill of human fingers to take off the folds and read the innermost legend and mystery. What will become of this or that when something else takes place? That is atheism, absolute and pestilent godlessness. What we have to do is to work up to the moment. Blessed is he who works up to the last moment. Some people wish for a long eventide. I pray, if I pray at all on that subject, not for a long eventide, but for sudden night.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee for these thirty-one years of strenuous labour. Though we cannot now thank Thee for the opposition and the hostility and bitterness with which early days were encountered, we do thank Thee for Thy supporting grace, Thy tender mercy, Thy daily care. We thank Thee for our sainted dead—not dead, but alive for evermore. If we have to spend a little time together may no root of bitterness spring up to trouble us; may we live in love, in mutual trust, in happy and emulous co-operation, each doing his and her utmost to make the kingdom of God visible to men. Our thanks be Thine, Thou Head of the Church. Amen.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the Triune God, abide with us, till the reunion. Amen.

ORDER OF SERVICE AT THE CITY TEMPLE ON SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 24TH, 1900.

Voluntary .. "Andante con Moto" .. *Hy. Smart*

Anthem 25 .. "What shall I render?" .. *Brown*

The Lord's Prayer.—*Field.*

Hymn 671 .. "Rise, my soul, adore thy Maker!"
(*1st Tune.*)

1st Lesson. Haggai ii. 6-9.

Chant 103 .. .. Psalm cxxxvi. .. .. *Hawes*

2nd Lesson. Heb. xii. 25-29.

Anthem .. "I will give thanks" .. *Barnby*

I will give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will speak of all Thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in Thee, yea, my songs will I make of Thy name, O Thou most Highest.—(PSALM ix. 1, 2.) The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thy hand, and fillest all things living with plenteousness.—(PSALM cxlv. 15, 16.) Great is our Lord and great is His power, yea, and His wisdom is infinite. He preserveth all them that love Him, but scattereth abroad all the ungodly. Therefore unto Him we raise hymns of glory, songs of praise. To the Father and the Son and the Spirit Three in One, honour, might and glory be, now and through eternity. Amen.

Prayer.

Hymn 407 (*1st Tune*): "O happy band of pilgrims."

Sermon

Offertory and Solo:

Recit. .. "O let me not wander" } *The Good Shepherd*)
Air .. "The Lord is my Shepherd" } *Barnett.*

Miss STANLEY LUCAS.

Hymn 449 .. "Hallelujah! song of gladness."

Benediction and Threefold Amen.—*Gounod.*

Voluntary .. .. "Postlude" .. .. *Wallis*

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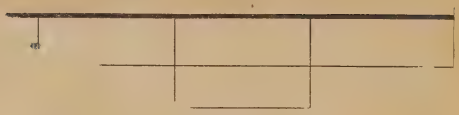

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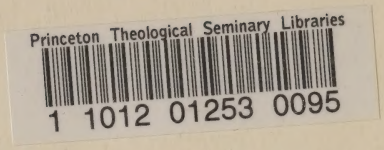
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